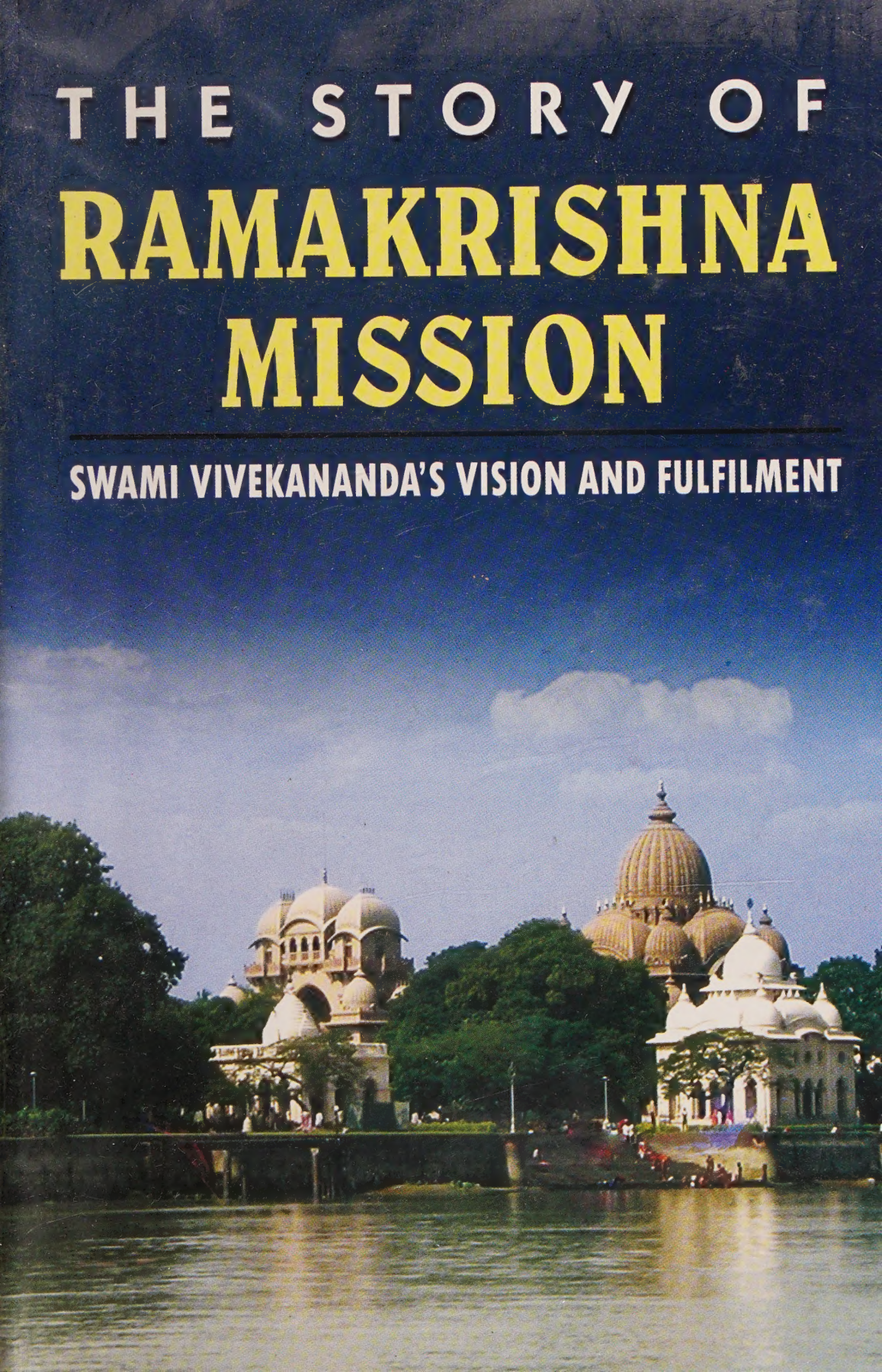
THE STORY OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S VISION AND FULFILMENT



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This is the story of Ramakrishna Mission. At the dawn of the third Millennium, Ramakrishna Mission reviews the story of its 109 years of loving service to humanity or, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, service to that God who by the ignorant is called man.

The book is divided into four parts under the titles: Sources of Inspiration, Historical Perspectives, Contributions of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Ideological Perspectives. As an epilogue is added the last article, World Thinkers on Ramakrishna Movement.

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Publisher's Note

Ramakrishna Mission completed one hundred years of its service to humanity in May 1997. To celebrate the event in a fitting manner a Centenary Celebration Committee was formed at Belur Math under the chairmanship of the General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The Committee took the decision to publish a commemorative volume as a part of the year-long (May 1997 – May 1998) celebration of the Centenary. Accordingly, an Editorial Board was formed with the following members:

Swami Lokeswarananda (Chairman)
Swami Prabhananda
Swami Bhajanananda
Swami Purnatmananda
Dr Nirod Baran Chakrabarty
Dr M Sivaramkrishna

For various reasons, however, the publication of the volume got delayed. It is now being brought out as an independent volume under the title *The Story of Ramakrishna Mission: Swami Vivekananda's Vision and Fulfilment.*

Although, legally and financially, Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math are independent institutions, they are inseparably related to each other ideologically and administratively. Moreover, there are several Ramakrishna Math centres which do the work of Ramakrishna Mission such as running hospitals, schools, dispensaries, rural development centres, etc. This means discussions on Ramakrishna Mission have necessarily to include Ramakrishna Math also. Therefore, in the present book the Mission and Math are taken together in all the discussions.

Apart from the Introduction, the book has four parts. The Introduction shows briefly how all the activities of the Math and Mission are based on Swamiji's understanding of the historical and global significance of Sri Ramakrishna's life and message, and indicates how far the twin institutions have fulfilled Swamiji's three-fold vision. The first part of the book is devoted to the lives and contributions of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, and the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. The second part gives brief accounts of the main events in the history of Ramakrishna Mission and Math. The third part gives information on the main contributions made by the Mission and Math to human welfare and progress by their services in education, public health, rural development and other fields of social life. The fourth part consists of discussions on various aspects of the Math and Mission's ideology and its practical implications. The book concludes with an Epilogue which brings together the views of eminent people on Ramakrishna Mission.

Most of the contributors to this volume are senior monks of Ramakrishna Order or devotees or supporters of Ramakrishna Movement. It is a matter of deep regret that some of these contributors are no longer with us on the physical plane. We particularly miss Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji and Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji, both past Presidents of Ramakrishna Math and Mission; and Swami Lokeswaranandaji, whose unexpected passing away deprived us of much support.

Several people have worked hard in bringing this book to the present shape. Among them special mention should be made of Cecile Guenther (now Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana of Vedanta Society, Hollywood) who did the copy-editing and proof-reading of most of the articles.

Scholars may find this book a useful reference book, but it is primarily meant for common people. This book is meant for all those who want to know—

- how a humble man living a simple life in a temple garden originated, by the power of Truth radiating from him, a worldwide spiritual movement known as 'Ramakrishna Movement' consisting of people belonging to different religions, sects, castes, races and nationalities, whose lives are governed by noble principles such as morality, seeking God, service as worship and harmony of religions;

- how a handful of educated young men, fired by the ideals of renunciation, service, and devotion to Sri Ramakrishna, started in a dilapidated old building a small monastic brotherhood which later developed into the huge twin institutions known as 'Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission' which together have 163 branches in most parts of India and in some other parts of the world;
- how Ramakrishna Math and Mission have been contributing to the welfare and progress of humanity by serving the poor, the sick and the downtrodden, by running schools, colleges, orphanages, dispensaries, hospitals, rural development centres, etc — for more than a hundred years;
- how the eternal, universal principles of the ancient Indian philosophy known as Vedanta can be applied in practical life to solve the problems of life at individual and social levels;
- how, in a world torn by religious, sectarian and ethnic conflicts, Ramakrishna Mission centres remain as oases of peace, harmony and spiritual light.

22 September 2006
Swami Akhandanandaji's Birthday

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THE STORY OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
— SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S VISION AND FULFILMENT

Introduction

THIS IS THE STORY of Ramakrishna Mission. At the dawn of the third millennium, Ramakrishna Mission reviews the story of its 109 years of loving service to humanity or, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, service 'to that God who by the ignorant is called man'.

Since the Ramakrishna Mission is inseparably linked to Ramakrishna Math, this is also the story of Ramakrishna Math. And, since the message of Sri Ramakrishna has been spreading in ever-widening circles through and beyond the two institutions mentioned above, this is the story of Ramakrishna Movement as well.

This story of Ramakrishna Mission, Math and Movement is not to be taken as mere history. History deals with the outer happenings of men and institutions, whereas 'story' deals with the inner dynamics of a movement. It is the unfolding of a Truth, a Power, through men and institutions.

Swami Vivekananda has stated that at the interval of every five hundred years a new set of universal ideas appear in some part of the globe. These ideas manifest themselves through an extraordinary person known as the Prophet or Avatar. Speaking about the function of a Prophet, Swamiji says: 'He focuses in his own mind the thought of the age in which he is living and gives it back to mankind in concrete form.'

This was what Sri Ramakrishna, who is regarded as the Avatar of the present age by millions of people, did. He came with a message, a new set of ideas suited to the needs of the present age. He first applied it in his own life and charged it with power. He trained a group of young disciples to be the torchbearers of his message, and through them laid the foundation of a new monastic Order, which came to be known later as the Ramakrishna Math. As in a hydroelectric project electricity is first generated by giant turbines and is then transmitted to different places through high-tension power mains, so also

the spiritual power generated by Sri Ramakrishna through his unprecedented *sādhanas* and prayers got transmitted to different parts of India and the world through his direct disciples. Subsequently, through the disciples of those direct disciples and through successive generations of disciples, the message and power of Sri Ramakrishna have been spreading in ever-widening circles to form what may be termed the Ramakrishna Movement.

The story of Ramakrishna Math began when Sri Ramakrishna climbed to the terrace of the house in Dakshineswar and called out: 'O my children, wherever you are, come to me. My heart yearns to see you.' This happened after he had completed the practise of various spiritual disciplines and people had started coming to see him. In response to that mystic call, young spiritual seekers, most of whom were studying in school or college, began to gather around him. Under his guidance they practised intense spiritual disciplines. During Sri Ramakrishna's last illness, these young men nursed him day and night. He instilled in their minds the spirit of monastic renunciation and also brotherly love for one another. Among them the Master earmarked Narendra (who later became the world famous Swami Vivekananda) to be the leader of the group.

After the Master's passing in August 1886, these young disciples started living in a dilapidated house at Baranagore in north Calcutta. A few months later, they took the formal vows of sannyāsa, assumed new names, and thus formed a new monastic Order which came to be known later as Ramakrishna Math. The monastery was moved six years later to another place in Alambazar, and from there it was finally moved to its own permanent premises at Belur in Howrah District in 1898. It was registered as a Trust in 1899, and since then it is being administered by a Board of Trustees consisting of senior monks of Ramakrishna Order.

Unlike the Ramakrishna Math which is a purely monastic Order, the Ramakrishna Mission is a social service society in which the monks of Ramakrishna Math and lay supporters cooperate in conducting different forms of social service such as running schools, hospitals, rural development, etc. It was founded by Swami Vivekananda on 1 May 1897, soon after his return from the West. The original idea probably was that the Mission would be managed by lay devotees. But since this did not materialize, owing to the unfavourable socio-economical condition of the society, the monks of

Ramakrishna Order took over the administration of the Mission also. The Ramakrishna Mission was registered as a charitable Society in 1909.

Swami Vivekananda's Three-fold Vision

All the activities of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and their outlook on society and the world, are based on Swami Vivekananda's three insights or three-fold vision.

Swamiji's first insight was into the true meaning and purpose of Sri Ramakrishna's life. During the early years of his contact with the Master Swamiji had difficulty in accepting him as an Avatar, but later revelations gave him the conviction that Sri Ramakrishna was the Avatar of the present age. Whereas most of the other followers of Sri Ramakrishna thought of him in relation to their own personal salvation, Swamiji thought of him in relation to the welfare of the whole mankind. Swamiji saw that Sri Ramakrishna's life was the verification of not only the eternal truths of religion discovered by the ancient sages of India but also the essential truths of all religions. This provided a new understanding of religion, and a new criterion to judge the truth claims of different religions. Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of the highest truths of the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras and other scriptures, and all these scriptures can be properly understood in modern times only in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's life.

Furthermore, Sri Ramakrishna served as the new door to salvation which was open to all without the distinctions of caste, religion or race. Above all, Sri Ramakrishna had, through his life, shown a new way of life and, based on this, it was possible to create a new society which aimed at spiritual fulfilment and followed the principles of equality, harmony of religions, service as worship and renunciation of lust and lucre. This insight into the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's Avatarhood gave Swamiji the faith that, with Sri Ramakrishna as the centre, a new India was gathering forces and will finally emerge in the world scene as the dominant spiritual power.

Swamiji's second insight was into the real cause of India's downfall and the means of uplifting her. While travelling all over India as a mendicant monk a few years after Sri Ramakrishna's passing, Swamiji saw with his own eyes the utter poverty and backwardness into which the masses who belonged to

the lower strata of society had sunk. And he realized that it was the neglect of these poor masses, who produced all the wealth of the nation, that was the primary cause of India's downfall. It is surprising that none of the religious leaders and social reformers in 19th century India other than Swami Vivekananda realized this simple truth.

Swamiji saw that what the masses immediately needed was the bare necessities of life like food and clothing, and for this they should be taught improved methods of agriculture and village industries. This meant secular education should spread among the masses.

However, Swamiji also saw that secular education alone was not enough. For, owing to centuries of neglect and social oppression, the poor in India had lost the capacity to take initiative for their betterment. It was therefore necessary to infuse in them self-confidence and courage to take up new ventures. Since religion played a vital role in the life of the poor, Swamiji believed that this could be done by giving them knowledge of the life-giving principles of Vedanta. This meant that, along with secular education, spiritual education must also spread among the poor.

Once Swamiji arrived at this conclusion, it also became clear to him that this project of two-fold education could be worked out and sustained only with the help of a powerful organization of dedicated workers. As he stated later, he wanted 'to set in motion a machinery which will bring noblest ideas to the doorstep of even the poorest and the meanest'. It was to fulfil the need for such a machinery that Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission soon after his return from his first visit to the West.

Here it should be mentioned that although Swamiji considered the neglect of the poor masses to be the most important and primary cause of India's downfall, he regarded neglect of women to be another important cause. Social reformers, especially the Brahmo leaders, in 19th century India had given much importance to women's education, no doubt. But they did not have such a lofty idea of the future of women as Swamiji had. It was in this context that Swamiji revealed yet another facet of his extraordinary genius and insight: he was the first among the followers of Sri Ramakrishna to understand the true significance of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's great life and the role she would have to play in the regeneration of women. In one of his letters Swamiji wrote: 'Mother (Sarada Devi) has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India;

and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world.' Swamiji looked upon Holy Mother as the divine complement to Sri Ramakrishna's Avatarhood, and as the Mother of the whole community (*sangha-janani*).

Swamiji's third vision was about India's spiritual contribution to world culture. Swamiji has pointed out that although religion is a universal phenomenon associated with every culture, there is something unique about India's religious tradition. It was in ancient India that the fundamental truths, principles and laws of spiritual life pertaining to true nature of the ultimate Reality (Brahman), the true nature of the human soul (Atman), man's ultimate destiny (mukti), different techniques (yogas) of getting spiritual experiences, creation of the world and so on were discovered. Just as science is one and universal, so also religion is one and universal. This universal Religion was developed in India by the ancient Rishis or seers of the Upaniṣads. This universal Religion, which Swamiji identified with Vedanta, is not against science, but complements it. This universal Religion is not contradictory to any other religion, but forms the common ground of all religions. It can, when applied in practical life, solve the existential problems of life.

In the course of his stay in the West Swamiji saw that although the people there had attained great material prosperity and power, the rise of science and rational thinking had undermined the bases of faith in religion and morality. As a result, there was a sort of spiritual vacuum in Western society and various psychological and existential problems had begun to appear. Swamiji believed that the eternal, universal principles of Vedanta, lived and taught by Sri Ramakrishna, would be able to fill up the spiritual vacuum in Western society, meet the challenges of science, and provide the Western people a satisfying view of reality and a meaningful way of life. India must contribute her spiritual wealth to world culture. As a matter of fact, it was the failure of India to maintain her contribution to world culture, owing to her isolation caused by foreign invasions and conquests, that was yet another reason for her backwardness.

At a time when India was considered to be an utterly poor and backward country which needed the infusion of Western culture to make its people civilized, Swami Vivekananda's declaration that India was spiritually superior to all other nations and had something to give to them, came, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru, 'as a tonic to the depressed and demoralized Hindu mind…'

Swamiji's ideas brought about a radical change in the attitudes of Indians towards their motherland, and profoundly influenced the leaders of India's Freedom Movement like Sri Aurobindo, Gandhiji, Netaji, Nehru and others. Swamiji's preaching work in the West also helped to change the attitudes of many Western people towards India and her culture.

Fulfilling Swami Vivekananda's Vision

Swamiji's three-fold vision discussed above underlies all the activities, aims and policies of Ramakrishna Math and Mission. As a matter of fact, the story of these twin organizations is the story of their efforts to fulfil Swamiji's vision, to put into practice Swamiji's ideas, his three-fold vision. Swamiji's three-fold vision defines the three main fields of work of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission: spirituality, social welfare and propagation of faith.

SPIRITUALITY

This is the main field of Ramakrishna Math's activity. In this field its main function is to serve as the channel for the redemptive work of Sri Ramakrishna. The primary purpose of the Avatar is to liberate humanity from suffering and bondage. This is a continuing work of the Avatar. The original spiritual power and mystic knowledge of the Avatar are kept in circulation through the unbroken line of teachers (*guru-paramparā*) in the Ramakrishna Order by the process of spiritual initiation (*dīkṣā*). All the activities of Ramakrishna Math and its branches are directly or indirectly connected to the redemptive work of Sri Ramakrishna.

Some of the main activities of Ramakrishna Math and its branches in the spiritual field are briefly discussed below.

1. Spreading a Spiritual Renaissance

If Indian culture has maintained unbroken continuity for nearly five thousand years, it is because it is built on the foundation of spirituality, and also because the vigour and purity of this spiritual foundation have been renewed at epochal intervals. It is now widely recognized that the advent of Sri Ramakrishna has resulted in a rejuvenation of spirituality in India, and

this has also led to an efflorescence in other departments of national life and culture. This phenomenon has been described as 'spiritual renaissance'. The Ramakrishna Math has been spearheading this renaissance for more than a hundred years.

2. Maintaining the Spiritual Vigour of the Nation

The spiritual impetus given by the Avatar has to be preserved and made available to all. Moreover, in order to prevent the decline of national vigour and culture, the spiritual vigour of the nation has to be maintained. This cannot be done by talking or reading. It can be done only by living intensely spiritual lives. The monks of the Ramakrishna Order as well as the lay devotees, by their spiritual practices, prayers, etc., have been contributing their share to the maintenance of the spiritual vigour of the nation.

3. Spiritual Guidance and Counselling

The life, message and power of Sri Ramakrishna has generated a new wave of interest in spiritual life in India. Thousands of people have turned to spiritual life and are practising meditation and other mental disciplines. Moreover Sri Ramakrishna himself is adored by thousands of people as their ultimate goal in life. By opening the channels of spiritual power through initiation (*dīkṣā*) and by giving guidance and counselling regarding spiritual life, the Ramakrishna Math has been rendering a form of spiritual service which is in no way less important than the various forms of social service rendered by Ramakrishna Mission.

4. Counteracting Forces of Degradation

Eminent historians like Spengler, Toynbee and Sorokin have shown that, when sensuality, indulgence in luxury, consumerism and indolence dominate a society as a result of increase in wealth and power, that civilization undergoes decline. In modern times the situation has become worse because of the dominance of atheism and materialism in the minds of people and the rising tide of immorality, violence, neuroses, drug addiction, etc. in society. By disseminating spiritual knowledge through books, periodicals, classes, discourses and personal talks, the centres of Ramakrishna Math are counteracting the forces of degradation mentioned above.

5. Unification of Hinduism

Hinduism is a vast and very complex socio-religious tradition with many sects and schools of philosophy, which have been at loggerheads with one another till recently. Following Sri Ramakrishna's openness of approach, the Ramakrishna Math accepts the religious doctrines of Shaivism, Shaktism and Vaishnavism, and all schools of philosophy from Dvaita to Advaita. It thus serves as a great unifying force in Hinduism. As a mater of fact, it is the only non-political, purely spiritual organization which represents *the whole* of Hinduism.

6. Harmony of Religions

Sri Ramakrishna showed that God can be realized through many paths, and that every sect and religion represents one such pathway to God. This idea he expressed through the dictum *yato mat tato path*, 'As many faiths, so many paths'. The monks of Ramakrishna Order not only propagate this idea of harmony of religions through books etc., but actually put it into practice in their community life. They celebrate the birthdays of the founders of different religions, and often conduct inter-religious conferences. The Ramakrishna Order admits people belonging to different religions into its ranks. The lay devotees also come from different communities. How important this idea of harmony of religions is in the modern world can be understood only when we remember that religious fundamentalism, supported by terrorism, is the single greatest threat to national integration and international peace and security in the present-day society.

7. National Integration

India is a land of bewildering diversities: diversity of language, diversity of culture, diversity of religion, caste, race and so on. There are centres of the Ramakrishna Order in different parts of India, including some remote areas. Monks of the Order live in these centres adapting themselves sometimes to difficult local conditions. In this way, they bring about social and cultural unity at national level. It is not widely known that Ramakrishna Math is the only non-Government, non-sectarian, non-political, spiritual organization with branches all over India and centralized administration, and this fact enables it to play an important role in national integration without any propaganda.

8. Rejuvenation of Monasticism

The Ramakrishna Order of monks represents a new ideal of monastic life established by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. This new ideal retains all that is best in the ancient Indian monastic tradition but adapts it to the conditions and needs of the present-day society. The new ideal emphasizes inner purity and renunciation and not outer show. It aims at all-round development of personality by the practice of the synthesis of the four yogas — Jñāna-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Dhyāna-Yoga and Karma-Yoga — represented by the emblem of Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The most striking feature of the new monastic ideal is the monks' involvement in social service activities. But social service is done not with an attitude of obligation or compulsion but with an attitude of worship, worship of God in human form.

The development of this new monastic ideal is a distinct contribution of Ramakrishna Math to social wellbeing in modern times. To understand how important this contribution is we have to bear in mind that monastic life is on the decline all over the world, whereas Ramakrishna Math shows a resurgence of the monastic ideal and rejuvenation of monastic life. This has exerted much influence on other monastic organizations in India.

9. Building an Enlightened Community

Swami Vivekananda wanted to have a community of lay people devoted to spiritual life, for only through such a community can the new message be spread and the new movement be sustained; not through monks alone. Right from Baranagore Math days there has been a close relationship between monks and lay devotees in the Ramakrishna Movement. Connected to each branch centre of Ramakrishna Math there is a group of lay devotees who are inspired by the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji. These devotees together form a community of enlightened people who lead a spiritual life, who are free from the prejudices of caste, religion, etc. Numerically, this community may be small now but is steadily growing, and holds great possibilities for the future.

SOCIAL WELFARE

This is the main field of activity of Ramakrishna Mission. However, most of the branch centres of Ramakrishna Math also conduct some kind of social service or other. As a matter of fact, when it comes to the field of social welfare, there is hardly any difference between Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math with regard to their activities. Both the organizations have the same motto in common: *Ātmano mokṣārtham jagad hitāya ca*, 'For one's own liberation, and for the welfare of the world.' The activities of both the institutions are based on two main principles of the philosophy of work propounded by Swami Vivekananda. The first principle is: there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular — all work is sacred. The second principle is: service to man is service to God. The important point to note here is that Swami Vivekananda gave a spiritual turn to secular work. This is what has enabled Ramakrishna Mission to undertake various types of secular work and yet retain its identity as a spiritual organization.

Two categories of service

The service activities conducted by the two institutions can be divided into two main categories: those of a temporary nature, and those of a permanent nature. The most well-known form of temporary service is providing relief, followed by rehabilitation, to the victims of natural disasters like earthquakes, cyclones, floods, drought, etc. Other types of temporary services are: providing drinking water, construction of low-cost houses, and low-cost toilets, for the poor. These schemes are terminated when their targets are attained.

Services of a permanent nature include running educational institutions, medical institutions, rural development centres, centres for children and youths, cultural centres, etc. Through these institutions several lakhs of people are benefited every year. These service activities have made Ramakrishna Mission a household name in several parts of India.

Three Phases of Ramakrishna Mission

It was stated earlier that, in the course of his travels all over India, Swamiji felt the need to have an organization to lift the masses from utter poverty and

backwardness. At any rate, when Ramakrishna Mission was formally inaugurated in 1897, its objectives were stated to be the following:

(a) to train teachers to impart both secular and spiritual education to the masses;
(b) to encourage arts and industries;
(c) to spread the life-giving principles of Vedanta lived and taught by Sri Ramakrishna.

Some more objectives were added when the Mission was registered as a society in 1909.

More than a hundred years have passed since the Mission was founded. Looking back over these years, we can see that Ramakrishna Mission has passed through three phases of development. The First Phase was from 1897 to 1947 when India got independence. During this period the extent of Mission's service was limited, and it carried on its work without any help or support from the alien government which ruled India then. Nevertheless, with limited resources, the Mission organized relief operations all over India for people affected by famines, floods, drought, earthquakes, etc., and also maintained schools, dispensaries, two or three hospitals, orphanages, etc. The focus of all services was mostly on the poor and the downtrodden.

The Second Phase was from 1947 to 1997 when the Mission celebrated its centenary. During this period the Mission worked in a free, democratic India, and this made a lot of difference. Along with democracy came the new concept of 'Welfare State'. According to this concept, the welfare of the people is Government's responsibility. During the early years, since the infrastructural facilities of the Government were limited, it had to depend heavily on non-government voluntary organizations like the Ramakrishna Mission which received massive help from the Government as consequence.

This dependence on the Government created two difficult situations also. In the first place, it restricted the Mission's freedom in conducting its service activities. Secondly, the Government began to play greater role in rendering service in different fields, and this reduced the role of non-government organizations like the Ramakrishna Mission.

Two more facts of this period need to be noted here. Forty years ago, Ramakrishna Mission was one of the very few social service organizations in India. But now there are thousands of such organizations all over India. The other fact is the rise of Middle Class in India. Before Independence there were only two classes in India: the rich and the poor. But after Independence, the middle class began to grow, and is now almost equal to the total population of USA. The middle class has been claiming a good share of the services rendered by the Mission especially in the educational and medical fields. However, since at least 25% of the Indian population is still below the poverty line, the original focus on the poor continues to be relevant.

During the Second Phase, the activities of both the Mission and the Math underwent very great increase in quantity and quality.

The Third Phase has been going on for about ten years. This phase is the result of the stupendous changes going on in the socio-economic conditions in India during the past ten years. From being a developing country India is now being catapulted to the status of an economic superpower rivalling China and USA. Three main factors have contributed to the rise of India. These are: (a) globalization; (b) triumph of free market economy (and the collapse of socialist economy); (c) the ongoing electronic revolution.

As a sequel to these developments, the pendulum of change is now swinging in the opposite direction. Although the concept of Welfare State still holds good, the emphasis now is on privatization in the production sector as well as service sector, and on autonomy of institutions, especially educational institutions. Since Ramakrishna Math and Mission are running a large number of educational institutions, this shift in Governmental policy can have far-reaching consequences for Ramakrishna Mission's social involvement.

Another sequel to the change in economy is the rise of a rich upper class in developing countries like India and China. It may take several decades for India to eliminate poverty and make the whole society affluent, but some of the problems of the affluent society which the Western countries have been facing have already begun to appear in Indian society also. At any rate, the present indications are that, in Ramakrishna Mission and Math's future list of priorities, the problems of the affluent society or class are likely to figure prominently. This takes us to the next topic.

PROPAGATION

In the earlier part of this Introduction we referred to Swamiji's threefold vision. The first vision was about the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's Avatarhood. The second vision was about India — the cause of her downfall and the way to uplift her. We have already discussed how the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission have been trying to fulfil these two visions of Swamiji.

Swamiji's third vision was about the contribution of Indian spirituality to Western culture. What Ramakrishna Math and Mission have done by way of fulfilling Swamiji's third vision is the next topic of discussion. There are three excellent articles on this subject in the present book, and so there is no need to discuss it in detail here. However, a few points in the work of propagation need to be clarified.

In the first place, 'propagation' of ideas does not mean propaganda. The Ramakrishna Order never attempted to swell the number of its followers in the West by means of aggressive publicity. Ramakrishna Order's method of spreading Vedantic truths has always been through personal talks, discourses, publication of books and journals, etc. As a result, the numerical strength of Ramakrishna Order's followers in West has never been very large.

The second point is, Ramakrishna Order's work in the West cannot be called proselytization. The people in the West are not asked to give up their religion and 'convert' to a new religion. The swamis only give them a set of eternal spiritual principles which can be adopted within any religious framework. The idea is to help people attain spiritual fulfilment within their own religious tradition. Moreover, swamis are sent from India at the request and initiative of the local devotees of the Western centre. Their acceptance of the message is also purely voluntary; no attempt is made to thrust ideas upon them.

Another issue which has attracted much attention in recent years is the large presence of ethnic Indians in our Western centres. Vedanta work was started in the West for the Western people and with their support. But from the 1960's the number of immigrant Indians has steadily increased, and many of them wish to retain their cultural identity. Vedanta taught by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, however, is broad enough to reconcile and absorb these diversities in due course.

Ramakrishna Movement

We have already mentioned that the original Power, Inspiration, and Message of Sri Ramakrishna are no longer confined to Ramakrishna Math or Mission but have been spreading in ever-widening circles, influencing people in different walks of life, to become a movement. What does a movement mean? In common parlance any general trend in society involving a large number of people is a movement. The Random House Dictionary defines a movement as 'a diffusely organized or heterogeneous group of people or organizations tending toward or favouring a generalized goal.' Sociologists give a more precise definition. One such definition is, 'A social movement is an organized attempt on the part of a section of a society to bring about either partial or total change in society through collective mobilization based on an ideology.'

Every social trend, every idea followed by a group of people, does not necessarily become a movement. According to sociologists, to be called a 'movement', a social trend must have the following components:

(a) *Leadership*: A movement is led by or inspired by some key personalities. In the case of a religious movement it is inspired by a Prophet and one or more saints or sages.
(b) *Participation by a large number of people*
(c) *Ideology*: Ideology is a set of concepts and principles centred around certain ideals. Ideology is the philosophy of action. It is ideology that gives identity to a movement.
(d) *Organization*: A movement can be sustained for long only if it is supported by a strong organization. Otherwise, the movement will become too diffuse and peter out.

All these four components of a movement are present in the Ramakrishna Movement. The Movement is inspired and powered by the Holy Trio — Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda — who also form the common goal and ideal for all the members of the Movement. Then there are the other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, each of whom was a spiritual giant. It may be stated in this context that Ramakrishna Movement has the distinction of producing the largest number of illumined souls, sages and

saints in recent centuries. As regards the followers of the Movement, they may be now counted in millions. The Movement has a comprehensive ideology which has stood the test of time. The Movement is sustained, held together and directed by the two organizations, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

There is, however, one basic difference between Ramakrishna Movement and other movements. Most social movements and many religious or spiritual movements peter out after a certain period of time. The Ramakrishna Movement is built on the strong foundations of spirituality, morality and monasticism, has a firm orientation towards the future, and is sustained by the power of the Avatar of the age. It is therefore expected to thrive for centuries. This future orientation, the keen awareness that the Ramakrishna Sangha is destined to play an important role in human history, is a distinctive feature of Ramakrishna Movement.

Four Streams

Ramakrishna Movement has now become a big river which is the confluence of several streams. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission together constitute the main stream. Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission together constitute another stream. The lakhs of lay devotees attached to these institutions form the third stream. Apart from these, there are hundreds of unaffiliated, independent Ashramas and study circles bearing the name of Sri Ramakrishna or Sri Sarada Devi or Swami Vivekananda; they together make the fourth stream of Ramakrishna Movement. The present book includes discussion on all these streams.

The Present Book

The present book was originally planned as a commemorative volume to be brought out as a part of the year-long (May 1997 – May 1998) celebration of the Centenary of Ramakrishna Mission. Owing to several reasons, the book could not be published then. It is now being brought out as an independent volume. The original plan and purpose of the book are, however, retained in the present volume.

The book is divided into four parts under the titles: Sources of Inspiration, Historical Perspectives, Contributions of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Ideological Perspectives. As an epilogue is added the last article, 'World Thinkers on Ramakrishna Movement'. The contents of these parts are briefly discussed below.

Part-I Sources of Inspiration

The main source of inspiration for the whole Ramakrishna Movement, its perennial fountainhead, is of course Sri Ramakrishna who is regarded by millions of people as the Avatar of the present age. The first article, 'Sri Ramakrishna — The Prophet of the New Age' gives a short account of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Its author Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, who was the 12th President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, is no longer with us on earth.

The second article, 'Sri Sarada Devi — The Embodiment of Universal Motherhood' highlights the rarest and noblest trait one may ever come across in hagiography — the unconditional, pure love of universal motherhood. Its author Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj is one of the Vice-Presidents of Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

Swami Vivekananda had to play two different roles in India and America, besides serving as a bridge between the East and the West. The third article, 'Swami Vivekananda — The Architect of Global Unity' discusses Swamiji's historical importance. Its author, Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, the 13th President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission is also unfortunately no longer with us to see the publication of this book.

Swami Vivekananda's original idea probably was that Ramakrishna Mission would be managed by lay devotees, just as Ramakrishna Math was being managed by the monks. But that did not happen and so Ramakrishna Mission too was taken over by the monks who got it registered in 1909. During those days of uncertainty four direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna — Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Turiyananda, and Swami Saradananda — played crucial roles in helping Ramakrishna Mission to break new ground. The fourth article discusses the roles played by these great monks.

Brief accounts of the lives and contributions of other direct disciples are included in the fifth article by Revered Swami Gahanananandaji Maharaj who is the present President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

The strong bond of mutual love, trust and respect that Sri Ramakrishna established between his householder disciples and young disciples has been maintained to this day by the succession of lay devotees and monks of Ramakrishna Movement. The roles played by some of the prominent lay devotees are discussed in the article 'The Lay Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna'.

'Echoes of the Past', the last article in the First Part, is a compilation of some of the statements made by the Holy Trio and a few of the direct disciples about the ideals and the future possibilities of Ramakrishna Movement.

Part-II Historical Perspectives

The Second Part contains articles on the history of Ramakrishna Movement in India and in the West.

The history of Ramakrishna Movement in India consists of four phases. The First Phase, described in this book as 'Laying the Foundation', may be said to have begun in 1872 itself when Sri Ramakrishna began his teaching work. During this period the first monastery was established at Baranagore in 1886 and was shifted to Alambazar in 1892 and then to Belur in 1898. Swamiji inaugurated Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 and gave a new direction to monastic life by introducing social service in the lives of monks.

The Second Phase, described as 'Consolidation of the Work', extended from 1906 to 1936. During this period the Math and Mission were guided by the Holy Mother and by Swami Brahmananda, Swami Saradananda and Swami Premananda. It was during this period that the Math and the Mission began to assume the shape that they now have.

The Third Phase, known here as 'Period of Growth of the Movement', lasted from 1936, when Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Centenary was celebrated, to 1950. Several important centres were started during this period. This phase is also notable for the wave of dissentions which shook the whole Movement but passed off without doing much harm.

The Fourth Phase, known as 'Expansion after Independence', extended from 1950 to the present time. During this period the Math and Mission

functioned in independent India and, with the financial support provided by the Government, they underwent expansion, not only in the number of centres but also in the extent and quality of work of each centre.

Ramakrishna Movement is known in the West as 'Vedanta Movement'. The Vedanta Movement in the West began with Swamiji's appearance at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and his subsequent work in the USA. Swamiji gave the best part of his public life to America, and it was America that played the dominant role in the spread of Ramakrishna Movement outside India. Therefore three articles have been devoted to a discussion on Ramakrishna Movement in the USA. The Movement in America may be divided into three phases:

(a) The Early Phase which lasted from 1893 to 1920. During this period the foundations of the Movement were laid by Swami Vivekananda followed by Swami Turiyananda, Swami Abhedananda, Swami Saradananda and Swami Trigunatitananda — all direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.
(b) The Middle Phase which extended from 1920 to 1970. During this period Vedanta Movement underwent the greatest development with regard to quantity and quality of the different centres and also with regard to the influence the Movement exerted on Western people.
(c) The Later Phase which began with 1970 and still continues.

All these three phases have been adequately covered by competent American monastics in this volume.

In the West, outside the USA, Ramakrishna Movement has established its bases in several European countries (France, UK, Switzerland, Holland and Germany) and two South American Countries (Argentina and Brazil). There is also a centre in Moscow in Russia. Coming to the East, Ramakrishna Vedanta centres are functioning in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Japan, Mauritius, Malaysia and Fiji. In recent years Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement has established its base in Australia also. There are short articles on all these centres in the Second Part.

For centuries the Hindu tradition had denied sannyāsa to women. The starting of a new monastic tradition for women in the Ramakrishna Movement is thus a historic event. A separate article deals with this subject with which the Second Part comes to a close.

Part-III Contributions of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

In the Third Part the contributions made by Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in the following fields are discussed.

1. Relief and Rehabilitation
2. Education
3. Medical service
4. Rural development
5. Tribal development
6. Literary Field
7. Advancement of Women
8. Family life
9. Monastic life

Part-IV Ideological Perspectives

As mentioned earlier, it is ideology that gives cohesion to a movement and a sense of identity to its members. Without an ideology a movement will have no sense of direction or unity of purpose. One of the factors which give strength to Ramakrishna Movement is that it has a comprehensive and powerful ideology rooted in three-thousand-year-old tradition of the land and expounded in modern times by Swami Vivekananda.

By ideology is meant philosophy related to praxis. In India philosophy has never been a mere speculative exercise. Indian philosophy always aimed at direct experience, *darśana*. Swami Vivekananda showed how philosophy can be applied in practical life to solve the problems of life.

In the course of the history of Indian culture there arose six systems of philosophy. But among them Vedanta alone has remained the philosophy of Hindu religion from Vedic times to the present age. Swamiji expounded this Vedanta philosophy in the modern idiom in the light of the life and experiences of Sri Ramakrishna, and showed how the basic principles of Vedanta can be applied in practical life to solve the problems of life. Swamiji called it Practical Vedanta. This Practical Vedanta is the ideology of Ramakrishna Movement.

The main tenets of Practical Vedanta are given below.

1. Each Soul is potentially Divine. (What this means is, man's real nature is neither the body nor the mind but the Atman, and this Atman is inseparable from the Paramatman, also known as Brahman. But, owing to beginningless *avidyā* or ignorance, people are not aware of this fact.)
2. The ultimate goal of life is to manifest this inherent Divinity. (To manifest inherent divinity means to realize one's true nature as Atman — Brahman, by the removal of *avidyā*. This is also known as God realization. It is the goal of life.)
3. The manifestation of Divinity, or God realization, can be attained by following any one of the four yogas: Jñāna-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Rāja-Yoga and Karma-Yoga. A synthesis of all the four yogas is, however, the best method.
4. Every religion is a pathway to the Ultimate Reality, which is known by different names in different religious traditions. Religions of the world are therefore not contradictory to one another but complementary.
5. God is present in all beings as the Supreme Self; hence service to man is to be regarded as service to God, and all work is to be treated as worship.
6. Spiritual life must have a foundation in morality. True morality is the assertion of the inherent purity and strength of the Atman.

The ideology discussed above finds expression in all the activities of the Ramakrishna Movement. The Fourth Part of the present book contains articles on the various theoretical practical aspects of this ideology.

Epilogue

The Epilogue, 'World Thinkers on Ramakrishna Movement', based on scholarly study, serves as a fitting finale to the story of the Ramakrishna Movement.

We may now conclude this 'Introduction' by pointing out that the real story of Ramakrishna Math and Mission is the untold story of the unending

self-sacrifice and service rendered by the great persons associated with these institutions right from Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji has shown in his lecture on 'My Master' how Sri Ramakrishna strove day and night to give spiritual guidance, solace and succour to hundreds of people who went to him with their problems. Holy Mother's life was a saga of self-sacrifice and service the like of which the world has not seen. Swamiji too wore himself out by working incessantly for others, and his life was a sacrifice at the altar of love for humanity.

This tradition of love, sacrifice and service, which has been kept alive by the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and by hundreds of monks and lay devotees, constitutes the real story of Ramakrishna Movement. It is written in letters of light in the unseen Soul of the Cosmic Being who sees everything.

— THE EDITORS

PART I

Sources of Inspiration

Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Sarada Devi

Swami Vivekananda

The monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna
(A painting by Swami Tadatmananda)

Sri Ramakrishna
THE PROPHET OF THE NEW AGE

SWAMI BHUTESHANANDA

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION stands for the mission of Sri Ramakrishna on earth. As an organization it came into existence on 1 May 1897. It was Swami Vivekananda who named the organization after his Master. Speaking at the historic first meeting of the Mission, Swamiji said: 'This Association will bear the name of him in whose name we have become sannyāsins, taking whom as your ideal you are leading the life of householders.... and whose holy name and the influence of whose unique life and teachings have, within twelve years of his passing away, spread in such an unthought of way both in the East and in the West. Let this Sangha or organisation be therefore named the Ramakrishna Mission.'[1]

This does not, however, mean that the mission of Sri Ramakrishna on earth is confined only to this organization. He belongs to all humanity and his power is working through various channels for the welfare of all people. But the Ramakrishna Mission is the principal channel, opened by Swami Vivekananda himself, for the propagation of Sri Ramakrishna's message. All the work of the Mission is undertaken in his name and all the achievements of the Mission are attributed to his glory.

Who was Sri Ramakrishna?

It is clear that a person who could inspire a great thinker, mystic, and leader like Swami Vivekananda to found such a world-wide organization in

his name could not have been an ordinary person. Even during his lifetime he was regarded as an Avatar or Incarnation of God not only by his own disciples but also by many others who knew him very well. In the great Avatars or Incarnations of God the divine and human elements are found blended in a harmonious way. This was true of Sri Ramakrishna also. Divinity shone through his whole personality as light shines through a glass crystal.

Who is this individual whom we call Sri Ramakrishna? This question may be best answered by narrating one of his parables. A man once saw an unfamiliar creature on a tree. It appeared to be red in colour. He came back to his friends and said, 'I have seen a red creature yonder on that tree.' Just then another person said, 'I was in that place just a little while ago, but what I saw was something deep green in colour.' A third person remarked that what he had seen was blue in colour. In this way they began to argue, each claiming to be right. Meanwhile another person arrived and asked, 'Why are you fighting?' After hearing everything, he broke into laughter and said, 'All of you are right. I stay under that tree and know the animal. It is a chameleon. It changes its colour from red to yellow and yellow to green, and sometimes it has no colour.'[2] Sri Ramakrishna was such a person. People see him from different angles. Viewed from the path of knowledge, he was a *jñāni*; viewed from the path of yoga, he was a *yogi*; viewed from the path of action, he was an ideal *karma-yogi*; and viewed from the path of love and devotion, he was a *bhakta*. But these terms do not describe him fully. Sri Ramakrishna was much more than what these terms indicate.

Jesus Christ said, 'In my Father's house are many mansions.'[3] God can be viewed from many angles. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says that the ocean is the ultimate goal of all rivers. Sri Krishna says in the *Gita* that, to each one, God appears in the form in which he or she worships Him. Sri Ramakrishna was a multi-dimensional personality. Human attributes do not exhaust his true nature. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'Indeed there are three words that prick my flesh: "guru", "master", and "father".'[4]

He never liked to be addressed as guru or teacher. Sri Ramakrishna never considered himself to be a preacher. He was not even conscious that he was going to be the teacher of the age, or for that matter, the teacher of anyone at all. He used to say, 'If somebody addresses me as guru, I say to him, "Go away, you fool! How can I be a teacher?" There is no teacher except

Satchidananda.'[5] Sri Ramakrishna would repeatedly say, however, that he was an eternal learner. This ideal of being an eternal learner was demonstrated to the fullest extent in his life. He was never tired of learning new things. He used to say, 'As long as I live, so long do I learn.'

Humility was a striking characteristic of Sri Ramakrishna. He did not like to be addressed as 'Master' or 'Father'. If anyone uttered such high-sounding words about him, he would instantly reply to this effect, 'I am your servant.' Once he told Keshab Chandra Sen, 'I am a servant of your servant, the dust of the dust of your feet.'[6]

Sri Ramakrishna was of course conscious of his unique divine nature and of his mission, but he disliked cheap propaganda. He detested name and fame. He did not like all kinds of people calling him an Incarnation of God. Two of his disciples, Ramchandra Datta, who was a medical practitioner, and the famous dramatist of those days, Sri Girish Chandra Ghosh, used to openly declare that Sri Ramakrishna was an Incarnation. Regarding this, Sri Ramakrishna once remarked:

> One is a doctor and the other is the manager of a theatre. They come here now and then and call me an incarnation! They think they extol me by doing so. But what do they understand of what is meant by an incarnation? Long before they came here and called me an incarnation, many persons like Padmalochan, who spent their whole lives in the study of these things — some of them well versed in the six philosophical systems and others in three — came here and called me an incarnation. To be called an incarnation has become disgusting to me. What will they add to me by calling me so?[7]

A Unique Phenomenon

Such statements of Sri Ramakrishna have made some people hold that Sri Ramakrishna has been set up as the world teacher or Incarnation of the age by his disciples. Critics feel that Sri Ramakrishna himself was indeed very unassuming, simple, and humble, and it is his followers who are claiming that he is an Avatar, a harbinger of world peace, and so on. It may appear to someone who has just read the words of Sri Ramakrishna quoted above that the critics are right. However, one must be cautious in making statements with regard to Sri Ramakrishna, taking into consideration only a few of his words out of

context. We must try to understand his life and teachings in a proper perspective. Swami Saradananda and Mahendra Nath Gupta or 'M' are two absolutely trustworthy persons who strove to leave for posterity authentic accounts of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. While reading the biography of Sri Ramakrishna, a superficial reader may find that it is a very simple life. But every earnest student will understand that he is dealing with a superhuman life.

The well-known American thinker and writer Joseph Campbell describes Sri Ramakrishna's astounding life:

> But in Dakshineswar...now hanging from a tree, now posturing and dressing as a girl; now weeping before an image; now sitting, night and day, like a stump; six years unable to close his eyes, himself terrified at what was happening to him, swooning in the ocean of the Mother's love; stunned by the experience of Brahman — Sri Ramakrishna cut the hinges of the heavens and released the fountains of divine bliss.[8]

As Swami Vivekananda has pointed out, Sri Ramakrishna's life was an extraordinary searchlight under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of Hindu religion. Swamiji said, 'This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life, and so raised himself to be an object lesson for future generations.'[9] A long chain of sweet paradoxes beautify the life of Sri Ramakrishna. From the beginning till the end, his life was a series of contrasts, which throw overboard all conventions we are familiar with. Here are just a few examples.

While on the one hand Sri Ramakrishna silenced those who called him a prophet, a world teacher, and so on, towards the very end of his life he admitted his prophethood to Narendranath, his intimate disciple, who was a great sceptic in those days. Swamiji said in later days that when Sri Ramakrishna was about to give up his body, two days before that sad event, he stood near his bed thinking that if now Sri Ramakrishna would declare that he was God, then only would he believe that Sri Ramakrishna was really God Himself. Instantly, Sri Ramakrishna said to him, 'He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, verily now is He Ramakrishna in this body.'

There is another important contrast in his life. Sri Ramakrishna was born illumined so to say. According to normal conventions, a spiritual aspirant has

to undergo spiritual disciplines in order to attain to the realization of God. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna, however, such presuppositions appear to have been flouted. By the age of seven, he had already attained very high spiritual states. All the spiritual experiences that he had came from somewhere inside himself, as it were. It was all inborn. The peculiarity is that in spite of these experiences he began his spiritual practices later on, and this he did with the deep urge to know the truth. This is a unique feature of the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He himself gives an explanation of this. He says that Avatars are born with the knowledge of God. They are like certain plants which bear fruit first, and then bring out flowers. Such contradictions may be observed in the lives of other Incarnations of God like Sri Rama, Sri Krishna and so on.

One other unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna often goes unnoticed. The general idea is that one has to first read the scriptures, understand the futility of life and the necessity of God realization, and then follow the instructions of the scriptures to perform *sādhanā*. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna, however, the order was reversed. After his spiritual attainments, his experiences were found to tally with the scriptures. Sri Ramakrishna practised spiritual disciplines following the intense urge of his heart, and he found later on that his realizations were mentioned in the scriptures. His realizations, however, transcended even Vedic records.

Sri Ramakrishna's intense desire to know God led him to the practice of different paths of Hinduism. He learnt various disciplines in Hinduism, practised them diligently, and attained the goal shown by each path very soon. Later on he practised Islamic and Christian disciplines too with success. At the end of these practices he found that all these paths led to the same goal. This very statement has been stressed in our scriptures repeatedly. The Vedas say, 'Truth is one, but sages call it by different names.' The *Gita* says the same thing. A similar idea may be found in the Purāṇas also. The idea was clearly there. What the world needed was a person who could undergo spiritual disciplines and prove this truth in his life. Sri Ramakrishna did just that. As has been stated by Swamiji:

> That Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was God incarnate, I have not the least doubt. Without studying Ramakrishna Paramahamsa first, one can never understand the real import of the Vedas, the Vedanta, of the *Bhāgavata* and

other Purāṇas. His life is a searchlight of infinite power, thrown upon the whole mass of Indian religious thought. He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim. He had lived in one life the whole cycle of the national religious existence in India.... Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is the latest, and the most perfect — the concentrated embodiment of knowledge, love, renunciation, catholicity and the desire to serve mankind. So, where is anyone to compare with him? He must have been born in vain who cannot appreciate him.[10]

Who is an Incarnation?

Swami Vivekananda has stated that the Incarnations are always 'the fair flowers of human life....they can transmit spirituality with a touch, with a wish, which makes even the lowest and the most degraded characters saints in one second....they are the teachers of all teachers, the greatest manifestations of God to man; we cannot see God except through them.'[11] Sri Ramakrishna has himself spoken many times about the nature of the Divine Incarnation. He says:

> God sports in the world as man. He incarnates himself as man — as in the case of Krishna, Rama, and Chaitanya. Once I said to Keshab: 'The greatest manifestation of God is in man.... If you seek God, you must seek Him in the Incarnations.'...One needs spiritual practices in order to know God and recognize Divine Incarnations.[12]

Scriptures will remain closed books only, and will never have much meaning if great souls do not come and live the principles stated in them. An Avatar comes age after age to teach humanity love of God, devotion, and knowledge, and also to be a symbol of God himself so as to help spiritual aspirants realize him. By meditating on and praying to the greatest manifestation of God, the Incarnation, a devotee crosses over the ocean of worldliness. It is not possible to comprehend the Infinite Brahman through the finite mind. Hence God assumes the concrete form of the Avatar, and by worshipping Him, the aspirant is liberated.

Scriptures are a mixture of 'sand' and 'sugar', as Sri Ramakrishna used to say. If scriptures are considered to be holy, how can they contain unwanted

things at all? The point is, the truths of the spiritual world are extremely abstruse and difficult for common people to comprehend. Hence they need dilution, or coverings, just as we find that grains have husks. We have to give up the chaff and take only the grain. To distinguish the grain of truth from the husk of words found in the scriptures is not an easy task. Such a difficult task is accomplished only by great personages like the Incarnations.

The Avatar makes the words of the scriptures alive, so to say, by living and embodying the truths that are taught in them, by realizing in his own life the goals set up by them. This is how the Avatar establishes dharma or religion, for, scriptures are the backbone of religion. The Avatar leads an exemplary life and provides a standard for future generations to lead a moral and spiritual life. The uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna is that his life enables us to understand the true, practical import of not only Hindu scriptures but also the scriptures of other religions. To quote Swamiji again, 'God, though everywhere, can be known to us in and through human character. No character was ever so perfect as Ramakrishna's, and that should be the centre round which we ought to rally, at the same time allowing everybody to regard him in his own light....'[13]

The Need of the Present Age

The greatest of the Incarnations, Sri Ramakrishna, was born in the present age. There must certainly be some significance attached to this event. What is the speciality of this age? This age has certain special features, which were not found in the previous age. The first remarkable feature is scientific thinking. Never before had science overpowered humanity as it has done now. In war or in peace, in medicine or in agriculture, in individual life or collective life, there is no field of activity in which science has not entered. Apart from the good that it has undoubtedly brought to humanity, there are certain of its side-effects which appear to overshadow all the good that comes from it. The wars of earlier centuries have become mockeries compared to the enormous power of destruction potentially present in modern weapons, which can bring an end to humanity in minutes.

The thinking of mankind too has changed. Prompted by an urge to think scientifically and rationally, the human mind seems to have forgotten that there is a place for faith in our lives. Rational thinking has eroded the

foundations of religion. And, since religions have been the traditional custodians of morality, the decline of religion has led to the decline of morality. This has led to an enormous increase in violence, immorality, the break-down of family life, mental disturbance, etc. in modern society. As a result there is only commotion and distress prevailing everywhere. With faith, love, sincerity, and other values going backstage, evil has taken a prominent position in society. Every society today has its own quota of evil to pour on the collective life of humanity.

The degradation in spiritual, moral, intellectual, cultural, social, and other aspects of life had begun even in the nineteenth century. It was at this juncture that Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna incarnated on the earth. The world-famous historian Arnold Toynbee, who began his career as a critic of Indian culture, later on wrote:

> Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance and delivered his message at the time and the place at which He and His message were needed.... Today we are still living in this transitional chapter of the world's history, but it is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race. In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by western technology. But this western skill has not only annihilated distance, it has armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power.... At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way.[14]

Prophet of the New Age

Such a great life and message as Sri Ramakrishna's cannot have significance for only one nation or territory. The Master's life and message transcend the limitations of race, region, and religion. Swami Vivekananda was one of the first to understand the global significance of his Master's message. According to Swamiji, every age has its prophet and, for the modern age, Sri Ramakrishna is the prophet. This does not mean that the Master came to displace the other prophets. The uniqueness of the prophethood of Sri Ramakrishna is that he embodied in himself the consciousness of all the other prophets. He is a mirror, as it were, in which one can find the reflections of all

the prophets of the past. A prophet comes with a definite message suited to the intellectual and emotional needs of the age. Sri Ramakrishna's message is particularly suited to the present age.

How can Sri Ramakrishna's message help us in this scientific age? Science accepts only those truths which can be verified. Sri Ramakrishna could not remain satisfied with mere faith in God. He wanted to prove to himself that God really existed. He showed that God is not a matter of dogma, of speculation, but a fact of direct experience. Through his own life he demonstrated that, just as the truths of the physical world can be verified through scientific experiments, the truths of the spiritual world can also be verified through direct transcendental experience. This spiritual verification principle is an important contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world.

God is not a distant object. He is man's inmost being. By realizing Him we realize our own true Self which is of the nature of Pure consciousness and eternal bliss. This realization alone can give us lasting fulfilment and peace. This teaching of Sri Ramakrishna, illustrated in his own life, has enabled millions of people to regain their faith in God. Mahatma Gandhi has borne testimony to this fact. He wrote, 'No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and all else is an illusion.... In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light.'[15]

Sri Ramakrishna awakened the spiritual consciousness of humanity. In olden times, it was only in theory that everyone could see God. With the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, religion has, in its true perspective, become available to everyone, irrespective of the differences in caste, colour, and so on. Everyone can see God. And one need not just believe in God but practise spiritual disciplines oneself and find out for oneself the truth of religion.

Another contribution of Sri Ramakrishna is the idea that one has to serve human beings looking upon them as God himself. The greatest manifestation of God is in the human being. Sri Ramakrishna used to repeatedly say, 'Is it only this? Does God exist only when the eyes are closed and cease to exist when the eyes are opened? Man is Narayana Himself. If God can manifest Himself through an image, then why not through man also?' It is not compassion that one has to show to others but devotion, says Sri Ramakrishna. This new

ideal is very much needed in this age, which is full of mutual hate and unending quarrels. When the outlook changes, when one understands that it is God alone that dwells in others, then alone can one truly love one's fellow-beings and serve them. This truth will help build an ideal society.

Sri Ramakrishna's life and message have opened a new approach to human relationships. This approach is based on the true meaning of love as an expression of the spiritual oneness of life. This view enables modern people to establish human relationships at a deeper spiritual level and make them stable, pure, and enduring.

The teaching of Sri Ramakrishna on renunciation is much needed in the present age, which has made wealth and sense pleasure the be-all and end-all of life. Human life is too precious to be wasted on sense enjoyments alone; it has a higher purpose. If we want to achieve anything higher, we have to sacrifice lower things. This is what renunciation really means. It is meant not only for monks. All people need some form of renunciation — renunciation of all that is evil for all that is good; renunciation of lower values for higher values, lower joys for higher joys; renunciation of selfishness for the common welfare.

Sri Ramakrishna's advice to renounce *kāmini* or woman has caused much misunderstanding. What he advocated was renunciation of attachment to woman as an object of pleasure. He had the highest regard for women whom he looked upon as manifestations of the Divine Mother.

In the modern world women are demanding equality, freedom, and power. It is, however, seen that the acquisition of these rights does not always lead to the elevation of women. This is because of the materialistic view of life on which those rights are based and also because of the lack of sanctification of motherhood. Motherhood does not mean merely a biological function. It stands for the highest form of love — unconditional, all-forgiving, all-forbearing, all-sacrificing love. A mother not only loves but also nurtures, sustains, protects, and guides her children. Motherhood is indeed a divine attribute. The ideal of divine motherhood ennobles and elevates womanhood. By looking upon all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna has given a new ideal for both men and women in the modern age.

In Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, this ideal of divine motherhood found its highest manifestation. Sri Ramakrishna knew fully well that she was born

to help him in establishing a new ideal for the modern age. He not only chose her as his bride but also trained and guided her, and shared his spiritual wealth with her. The Holy Mother herself on one occasion stated, 'My son, you know that the Master had the attitude of Mother towards everybody. It is to propagate the ideal of the Motherhood of God that he has left me behind on earth.'[16]

The teaching for which Sri Ramakrishna is most well known is the doctrine of the harmony of religions. He did not start a new religion. There already existed several religions and countless sects. The great need of the time was a principle of harmony, which would unite people instead of dividing them, and make religion a constructive force in the advancement of human culture. It was this need that Sri Ramakrishna came to fulfil.

As the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 showed, the idea of the harmony of religions had already begun to engage the minds of many thoughtful people by the end of the nineteenth century. But nobody knew how to bring about this harmony. It is Sri Ramakrishna who has shown the way. He has shown that the harmony of religions is not a matter of talk, scholarship, etiquette, or social adjustments, but a matter of direct experience. It is bound up with the nature of Reality. The ultimate Reality is only one, but known in different religions by different names such as Brahman, God, Allah, Jehovah, and so on, just as the same water is known as *vāri*, *jal, water, pāni*, etc. in different languages. But although the ultimate Reality is one, the paths of realizing it are many. It is ignorance of this basic truth that is the root-cause of all conflicts among religions. Though this is a simple truth, it could never be put into practice because the world needed a person who had the wisdom and capacity to follow the different paths of religions and realize that they all ultimately led to the same Reality. Sri Ramakrishna was the only person who could accomplish this superhuman task.

It is this idea of transcendental experience as the basis of the harmony of religions that is the unique contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to modern thought. It is in this light that Sri Ramakrishna's famous statement, 'As many faiths, so many paths' (*yato mat tato path*), is to be understood. Sri Ramakrishna did not ignore differences among religions. He admitted that there are errors and defects in all religions. But this does not mean that we should criticize any religion. Each person should stick to his own path, and if he strives with sincerity, purity, faith, and intense longing, he is sure to realize God. Sri Ramakrishna said:

> All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion. Suppose there are errors in the religion that one has accepted; if one is sincere and earnest, then God himself will correct those errors. Suppose a man has set out with a sincere desire to visit Jagannath at Puri and by mistake has gone north instead of south; then certainly someone meeting him on the way will tell him: 'My good fellow, don't go that way. Go to the south.' And the man will reach Jagannath sooner or later. If there are errors in other religions, that is none of our business. God, to whom the world belongs, takes care of that. Our duty is somehow to visit Jagannath.[17]

Harmony of religions is not the only type of harmony that Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught. In his life and teachings we can see the harmony of knowledge and devotion, the harmony of ancient spiritual ideals and modern ways of life, and the harmony of a householder's duties and renunciation. Sri Ramakrishna did not live in a cave as many monks do, nor did he retire to a forest hermitage as the ancient sages did. In his dress, food, and manners there was hardly anything to distinguish him from an average Indian of his time.

Sri Ramakrishna set a new ideal for householders. He did not encourage his householder disciples to become sannyāsins. He wanted householders to earn their living by honest means and maintain their families instead of depending on the charity of other people. He, however, held that it is possible for householders also to realize God, and that they should strive to attain this goal by the practice of detachment, discrimination, self-control, self-surrender, prayer, etc.

Lastly, it should not be forgotten that Sri Ramakrishna was a great lover of humanity. His love knew no barriers of region, religion, race, or caste. It was unconditional and not based on any selfish considerations. He did not like the word 'compassion' (*dayā*), because it implies a condescending attitude. But he had a very tender heart which could not bear the sufferings of others. He did not make a show of his love and concern for suffering people, as many social leaders do. For his love came from a deeper source than the body and mind, and his concern for people was of the nature of a divine commitment. A few days before his passing, he told his spiritual spouse that she had much

work to do for suffering people. He trained a band of young men not only to lead intensely spiritual lives but also to work for the welfare of the world.

The Ramakrishna Mission is the concrete form of Sri Ramakrishna's love for humanity.

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Sri Sarada Devi
THE EMBODIMENT OF UNIVERSAL MOTHERHOOD

SWAMI ATMASTHANANDA

Universal Motherhood

LET ME BEGIN WITH AN ANECDOTE. The event took place nearly fifty years ago. Place: a lonely cottage at the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kishanpur. Time: morning, seven o'clock. The golden rays of the wintry sun were shedding a pleasant warmth. At a distance the Shivalik ranges could be seen as if lost in meditation. All around there were many-blossomed shrubs and trees. Somewhere below a brook could be heard gurgling past. Two or three birds were chirping. The birthday of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was only a day or two away. Seated on a carpet was Swami Jagadananda — a senior monk who was a scholar in Vedanta and also a disciple of the Holy Mother. Facing him sat a young, newly-ordained monk eager to learn Vedanta from him. The young monk said, 'It is possible to grasp, to understand a little of the immense spirituality of Sri Ramakrishna. It can at least be inferred to some extent. But in the case of Holy Mother's life we are unable to form any idea of its depth however much we try. How many monks and holy men, how many ascetics and men of dispassion, how many scholars and savants used to go to Sri Ramakrishna! And Dakshineswar, where he practised so many spiritual disciplines — what a wonderful place it was! But Holy Mother attained all her spiritual realization in such a silent, unobtrusive and natural way, even while engaged in all the daily household chores. Really, Maharaj, it is something mysterious, unprecedented, incomparable!'

'Right you are!' exclaimed Swami Jagadananda. 'It is not possible to understand Holy Mother: how great she was, how deep she was! Who indeed was this Holy Mother? — it is not possible for us to know. All that we know is, she is the Mother.' While speaking thus about the Holy Mother, the venerable monk was overwhelmed with emotion, and tears started rolling down his cheeks.

After observing how even a man of knowledge, well established in Vedanta, looked upon the Holy Mother, none but a foolhardy person would attempt to speak about her. But then our Holy Mother is of such a nature that every one of her children thinks that he knows his Holy Mother best. Not only that, he thinks that nobody else knows her quite as well as he does. Holy Mother treated everyone as her own child. In her house an ignoramus had as much place as a learned man. She herself said: 'I am the mother of the virtuous and the mother of the wicked. I am the mother of the good and the mother of the bad. I am the mother of Sharat and the mother of Amjad. I am the mother. Whoever calls me "Mother", I am his or her mother. I am the mother of all.'

Now let us see how this great Mother of the Universe, who hid herself behind the veil of modesty, appears to an ordinary mind limited by ignorance. Hindu mythology and epics have given a high place to the feminine ideal of chastity in the sense of one-pointed devotion to one's husband. Sita's accompanying her husband to the forest, Savitri's victory over the King of Death, and Vishnupriya's ascetic life after Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's ordination into sannyāsa are well-known illustrations of chastity. Then, there is the ideal of the spiritually illumined women exemplified by the Brahmavādinis of the Upaniṣads and the saintly nuns of Christianity and Buddhism. But in the history of mankind the ideal of motherhood, universal motherhood, was established for the first time by Sarada Devi. Of course, everybody knows of the love, devotion, and sacrifice of an ordinary mother for her own children. But to show the same motherly love towards all, the ideal of universal motherhood, is nowhere seen except in the life of the Holy Mother. The ideal of 'God of all' has been exemplified in the lives of Krishna, Christ, and others. But the ideal of 'Mother of all' is a startlingly new ideal. How many types of relationships an ordinary individual has to enter into in his life every day — as father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, master or servant, doctor or patient, shopkeeper or customer, and so on! But a woman establishing the same relationship with all, looking upon them as her children — who else did it

other than the Holy Mother? This may appear to be incredible, but is nevertheless true.

When we turn to the life of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, what do we find? Nothing but motherhood, pure and simple. She was the Mother of all; she did not care for any other relationship. She never asked anyone to look upon her as anything but the Mother. An Incarnation's consideration of virtue and vice had no place in her life. She was utterly free of any splendour usually associated with Incarnations. She had no need to be born under the compulsion of any historical circumstances as other Incarnations had. She herself was the fountain of universal creative power. Where there is creation, where there is birth, there is motherhood. Motherhood itself is the First Cause. There is no cause beyond that. The Divine Mother is the uncaused Cause of the universe.

It was this divine motherhood that Sri Sarada Devi revealed through her artless statement: 'I am the mother of the virtuous, and I am the mother of the wicked. If any child of mine gets covered with dust or dirt, I myself have to wash him and take him on my lap.' She had totally transcended all the polarities of life — virtue and vice, good and bad, knowledge and ignorance, purity and impurity, etc.

Sri Ramakrishna himself established her in all-embracing, all-forgiving universal motherhood. This was pointed out by Holy Mother herself: 'The Master had the attitude of a mother towards everybody in the world. It is to spread and glorify that attitude that the Master has left me on earth this time.' Was it because he looked upon her as the Mother of all that he offered the last oblation of his austerities to her?

Sri Ramakrishna was very particular about purity in personal conduct and could not stand the company of immoral people. Once he noticed a woman who had led a loose life in her youth frequenting the room where the Holy Mother stayed. He asked Holy Mother: 'Why is that woman here? She is a public woman. Why talk with her?' Holy Mother simply said: 'She now talks only of Hari. What is the harm in that?' She continued to allow the unfortunate woman to visit her as before. Can a mother reject her child who has sought refuge in her?

Another day Holy Mother was carrying food to Sri Ramakrishna when a woman came there saying, 'Give the food to me, Mother', and took the plate from Holy Mother's hands. She placed it before Sri Ramakrishna and went

away. The Master could not take the food touched by that woman. When Holy Mother requested him earnestly to eat, the Master told her, 'Promise that you won't hand over the food to anybody else hereafter.' With folded hands Holy Mother replied: 'That I cannot, Master! I shall certainly bring your food myself, but if anyone calls me "Mother", I can't help handing it over.'

When people brought gifts of fruits, sweets, etc. to Sri Ramakrishna, he would send those things to Holy Mother who would promptly distribute them among the women devotees and others who were with her. One day the Master tried to warn her about this thriftless habit. But the Mother walked away with such a grave expression on her face that the Master sent somebody to pacify her. She could never brook any interference in her motherly affection.

Divine Mother — the Refuge of All

Didn't Holy Mother ever reprimand or punish anyone? Of course, she did — but only to set right or purify the minds of those children who had erred. When Harish, whose brain had been deranged by poison administered by his wife, tried to make an improper approach, the gentle and bashful Sri Sarada Devi assumed that terrible aspect of the Divine Mother known as Bagalāmukhī and dealt with him severely. But the drubbing that Harish received that day at her hands cured him of his madness. He went to a holy place and spent time in spiritual practice. As one of the Sanskrit hymns puts it, there can be a bad son (*kuputra*), but there can never be a bad mother (*kumātā*). A mother may scold or punish, but will never curse her children. It is her love that gives the mother the authority to punish her children. She does it only for their own good.

One day Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on the small cot in his room and Sri Sarada Devi was sweeping the floor. Suddenly she asked him, 'Who am I to you?' Without a moment's hesitation, the Master replied, 'You are my blissful Divine Mother.' Sri Sarada Devi had become Sri Ramakrishna's mother! A husband looking upon his wife as mother — this is an unprecedented thing! On another occasion, when Holy Mother was massaging the Master's feet, she asked him, 'How do you regard me?' Again came the answer, 'The Mother who is in the (Kali) temple, the mother who gave birth to this body, the same mother is now massaging my feet. Really, I see you as the true form of the

Blissful Mother.' Sri Ramakrishna's performance of the Shodashi rite was in fact the ritual enactment of the transfiguration of Sri Sarada Devi into the Divine Mother of the Universe. With that, the Master put the seal of divinity upon her, and she has remained the Blissful Mother ever since.

Once during the worship of the goddess Jagaddhātri at Jayrambati, a pious brahmin by the name Ramhriday Ghoshal of a nearby village was present. Finding Holy Mother lost in meditation before the deity, he kept his eyes fixed on her for a long time, for he could not make out who was the deity and who the Holy Mother! A pious woman who was Holy Mother's companion from her childhood, and known to devotees as Aunt Bhanu (Bhanu Pishi), had a vision of the Holy Mother as a goddess with four arms. A poor woman called 'Mrigendra's mother' used to prepare puffed rice (*mūri*) and do other odd jobs at the Jayrambati home of the Holy Mother. She could see the celestial form of the Holy Mother whom she regarded as the goddess Rājarājeshvari.

The members of Sri Ramakrishna's family also regarded Sri Sarada Devi as the Mother. One morning, the Master's young nephew Shivaram suddenly appeared at Jayrambati just to see the Holy Mother. In the evening Holy Mother asked him to return to Kamarpukur as he had to do worship there. But Shivaram, after going a short distance, returned and fell at Holy Mother's feet crying, 'Mother, tell me what will be my lot.' Though Holy Mother tried to console him, he refused to be pacified. 'You have to take up my burden', he insisted, 'and tell me that you are what you earlier told me you were.' On an earlier occasion Mother had admitted to Shivaram that she was the Divine Mother Kali. Now unable to bear the earnest appeals of Shivaram, the Holy Mother placed her hands on his head and declared in a solemn voice, 'Yes, that is so.' This sent a thrill through Shivaram. He lifted his head and, kneeling before her, chanted the well-known salutation hymn from the *Chandi* beginning with *sarvamaṇgala-māṇgalye*. He went away fully convinced that Holy Mother was the wielder of people's destiny. Shivaram's elder sister was Lakshmi. A widow from her childhood and an advanced adept in the Vaishnava mode of *sādhanā*, she was much loved by Sri Ramakrishna. She regarded the Master and Holy Mother as one.

The famine of 1864-65 caught Jayrambati in its grip. Sri Sarada Devi's father Ramachandra, though poor, was kind and charitable. He had a stock of grain from the previous year's crop, and at once opened a free kitchen, without

thinking about the hardship it might cause to his own family. Hot *khichuḍi* (rice boiled with lentils) was served to the famished people. Eleven-year-old Sarada showed evidence of her universal motherhood even at that tender age. When hot food was served on leaf-plates, she would stand there fanning it with a big fan, which she had to hold with both her hands, in order to cool the food so that the starving people could eat it at once.

Holy Mother kept herself informed of contemporary events and openly expressed her deep sorrow at the suffering of people caused by the outbreak of the first World War, the repressive measures of the British Government against freedom fighters in India, floods, drought, etc. Sometimes, unable to bear the suffering of others, she would shed tears in silence. She once said to a young disciple: 'How great the suffering of people is you will understand when you grow up. You are not a mother.' For all suffering people the Holy Mother was a real mother who cared.

Holy Mother was the mother even of dacoits! It happened during one of her early visits to Dakshineswar. She was travelling on foot. On the way lay a stretch of vacant land known as Telo-bhelo, the dreaded haunt of dacoits. Since she could not keep pace with her companions, they went ahead of her, and at dusk she found herself alone at Telo-bhelo. Suddenly there loomed before her a tall, dark man with dishevelled hair and a heavy staff. Fixing his fierce eyes upon the Holy Mother, he drew closer and demanded in a gruff voice, 'Who is standing there?' But as he looked at Holy Mother's face, a change came over the man and he stood there with his head bent. Meanwhile, his wife also appeared on the scene. Holy Mother, with her natural innocence and simplicity, told them that she was their daughter Sarada and had been left behind by her companions. They arranged for her food and sleep that night, and the next morning took her to Tarakeswar where they met her companions. In one night the dacoit couple and their 'daughter' had become so close to each other! As regards the sudden conversion of the robber couple, Holy Mother later on said that they had told her that they saw the Divine Mother Kali in her. Not only that, they told her, 'You hide that form from us because we are sinners.'

Shiromanipur was a village not far from Jayrambati. The villagers were mostly Muslims who lived by cultivating mulberry trees and rearing silk-worms. But owing to the large-scale import of foreign silk, many of them lost

their trade and took to robbery as a means of livelihood. Some of them were employed in the construction of Holy Mother's new house at Jayrambati. Holy Mother treated them as her own children, and this brought about a transformation in them. Even the fastidious villagers began to say, 'By the grace of Holy Mother the robbers too are becoming devotees.'

A crazy woman used to come to Holy Mother at Dakshineswar. At first all took her to be merely insane and so treated her kindly. Afterwards it turned out that she belonged to that class of spiritual aspirants who considered God as their sweetheart. She regarded Sri Ramakrishna as her Chosen Ideal, and one day ventured to speak out her mind to him. This created a sudden commotion in the mind of Sri Ramakrishna as it was against his own attitude of looking upon all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother. He started pacing up and down in his room condemning the crazy woman's attitude in strong, abusive colloquial Bengali. The Holy Mother heard all this from the nahabat. Feeling humiliated by this insult to her daughter, she at once sent Golap-Ma to call the crazy woman to her, and when the woman came, she said affectionately, 'My daughter, you had better not to go to him since your presence irritates him. You can come to me.' Holy Mother also remarked to Golap-Ma that the Master should not have insulted the woman in this way. The poor woman found refuge in the Holy Mother.

Holy Mother was once staying at the Jagadamba Ashrama in Koalpara. The Ashrama was in a lonely place surrounded by a jungle frequented by wild animals. It was ten o'clock at night. Holy Mother was sitting under a tree talking with her attendants. All of a sudden, she began to speak of the lunatic of Shihar. Hardly had she finished speaking when the lunatic himself appeared on the scene with a bundle of leafy vegetables under his arm. Everybody was frightened but Holy Mother remained calm. The mad man said he had brought the vegetables for her. She said to him softly, 'Please go away; don't make any noise.' But he said he could not go back as the river was in spate. The Holy Mother told him in a persuasive but sweet voice, 'My good child, don't create any disturbance.' Holy Mother's love soothed the man's heart and he left the place in a calm mood. If Sri Sarada Devi could become the mother of dacoits, she could also with equal felicity become the mother of lunatics.

The scene changes. The Holy Mother is now at Udbodhan, her residence in Calcutta. It is the sacred hour of dusk. Holy Mother is sitting on the first-

floor verandah doing japa with her rosary. Across the road is an open space where some poor people of the labouring class live. The evening stillness is suddenly broken by the sound of a man beating his wife. After the blows, he gives her such a kick that she rolls down into the courtyard with the baby in her arms. The man still goes on kicking her. Holy Mother's japa stops. Although she is well known for her shyness and gentleness, a change has now come over her. She stands up holding the railing and shouts to the man, 'I say, you wretch, are you going to kill your wife? Alas, what a pity!' The man who has become mad with anger looks up, and the sight of the motherly figure acts like a charm on a hooded snake. With lowered head he leaves the scene. Holy Mother's sympathy makes the woman burst into tears, and the man comes back to console her. Seeing this happy ending, Holy Mother sits down and resumes her japa. Thus has the Holy Mother shown herself to be the Mother of the downtrodden and the insulted.

In the Eyes of Monastics and Lay Disciples

At Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna had earmarked a few of his young disciples as the founding members of his future monastic Order. After the Master's passing away, they came together one by one — Naren, Rakhal, Sharat, Shashi, Latu, Yogin, Baburam, and others. Holy Mother was to them an unfailing source of strength, and they rallied round her as their centre. Right from their early days at Dakshineswar, the Holy Mother used to regard them as her own children. She always kept a watchful eye upon them, and her protective influence was felt by all the young disciples of the Master. It was only natural that they all looked upon her as their own true Mother. They had the firm conviction that Holy Mother was not an ordinary woman, but the helpmate of Sri Ramakrishna in his mission on earth. For them she was the Divine Mother herself who had assumed a human form. More than anyone else it was Swami Vivekananda who understood the universal significance of Holy Mother's life and recognized her central role in the regeneration of Indian culture. Before starting his long travels in India as a mendicant monk, Swamiji first begged for Holy Mother's blessings. Again, when the call to go to the West came to him, he sought Holy Mother's advice before making his decision. Later on he wrote in a poem, 'I am the servant of you both; I salute your feet

united with Shakti.' In a letter to fellow disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji spoke of the Mother as the 'Living Durga'.

Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, used to be so overwhelmed with devotion in the presence of the Holy Mother that his whole body would shake. He regarded her as the embodiment of the Power of Brahman. He used to say, 'Mother is none but the Divine Mother of the universe who has assumed a human form.' Among the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Latu Maharaj was Holy Mother's first attendant, and he regarded her as his own mother. He used to say, 'Is it easy to understand the Mother? She could accept the worship offered by Sri Ramakrishna. Just think of her power!' Who the Holy Mother was, he alone knew: of course, Swami Vivekananda also understood a little. She was none else but Goddess Lakshmi.

If Sri Sarada Devi was the mother of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, she was in no way less the mother of his lay disciples. 'M' (Mahendranath Gupta), Nag Mahashay, Balaram Bose, Akshay Sen, Manomohan, Navagopal, Haramohan, Devendra and others were the favourite lay children of the Holy Mother. Gradually, they came to realize that she was not merely the wife of their guru, but the eternal playmate of Sri Ramakrishna in his divine *līlā*. She manifested herself to them in their mystic experiences. 'M', the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, regarded the Holy Mother as his own mother. He began his diaries with the line, 'Taking refuge at the feet of my guru and Mother.'

Another householder disciple whose devotion to Holy Mother was unrivalled was Nag Mahashay, the personification of humility. In the presence of the Holy Mother he would lose external consciousness and could utter only 'Mother, Mother'. The Holy Mother herself had to feed him with her own hands. When he left her presence, he was heard muttering, 'Mother is more compassionate than Father, Mother is more compassionate than Father.'

Among the householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, the famous playwright Girish Chandra Ghosh had a special relationship with the Holy Mother. He said, 'Did we ourselves recognize her in the earlier days? It was Niranjan who opened our eyes.' From that time onwards Girish looked upon the Holy Mother as the Divine Mother of the Universe of whom he had once, in his early youth, had a wonderful vision when he was lying alone seriously ill. In answer to Girish's blunt question, 'What kind of a mother are you?' Sri

Sarada Devi replied without a moment's hesitation, 'I am your own real mother – a mother not because of being your guru's wife, not because of any assumed relationship, not by way of empty talk, but truly your mother.' The reply was meant not for Girish alone. It was addressed to all her children. When his only son died in early childhood, Girish was utterly disconsolate and, to bring peace to his grief-stricken soul, Swami Niranjanananda took him to Jayrambati. Mother took great care of this son of hers, and her pure and unselfish love turned the great poet into a child at her feet.

Once Girish had an intense desire to have the presence of the Holy Mother at his home in Calcutta during the Durga Puja. The Mother acceded to his wish, and left Jayrambati for Calcutta. She stayed at Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. During the first two days of the worship she remained at Girish's home from morning till evening accepting the salutations of hundreds of people. She was not feeling well, and the strain of the two days made her very ill. So it was decided that she would not be present during the most auspicious *sandhi-pūjā* (worship done at the juncture of the eighth and ninth lunar days) at night. On hearing this, Girish felt so depressed that he refused to go to the worship hall. But when the sacred moment approached, the Holy Mother suddenly appeared in the worship hall, having walked with a woman companion from Balaram's house at night. Girish's joy knew no bounds. With a choked voice and gasping breath he began to tell everybody present there, 'I thought my worship was in vain, but just now Holy Mother has come herself, knocking at the door and announcing, "Here I am".' Thus Girish was blessed with the privilege of worshipping the living Durga as his own mother.

Sri Sarada Devi was looked upon as their true mother by Sri Ramakrishna's women disciples as well. Among them was the aged, orthodox widow known as 'Gopala's Mother'. She had realized Sri Ramakrishna as Gopala or Baby Krishna. And she looked upon the Holy Mother as the Primal Power born as the spiritual complement of her Gopala. She used to say, 'Unless I see both of you as inseparable, my mind doesn't feel satisfied.' When Gopala's Mother was on her death bed, the Holy Mother went to see her. When she was informed of the Holy Mother's presence, the old lady said, 'Gopala, you have come? Today you should take me on your lap.' The Holy Mother lifted the head of Gopala's Mother on to her lap. The dying saint wanted to touch the feet of the Holy Mother as a mark of respect. The dust of Holy Mother's feet

was put on her head. For Gopala's Mother, the reality of the Holy Mother was inseparable from that of her Gopala.

Another woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was known to all the devotees as Gauri-Ma, but the Holy Mother used to call her Gaur-Dasi. She used to speak of Holy Mother as 'the living Divine Mother of the Universe', 'the Goddess Lakshmi herself', 'the Power of Brahman' and so on. The Holy Mother's closest attendant for thirty years was Golap-Ma. She managed the Holy Mother's household when Holy Mother was in Calcutta. She used to worship the Holy Mother as Mahāmāyā, born to give liberation to people. Another close associate of Holy Mother was Yogin-Ma. From a vision granted to her by Sri Ramakrishna, Yogin-Ma gained the realization that the Holy Mother was utterly pure, undefiled by the evils of the world. Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma were to Holy Mother what Jaya and Vijaya are to the Divine Mother Durga.

Sangha Janani

The Holy Mother is the Mother of the entire Ramakrishna Order. She began playing this role even during her Dakshineswar days. Sri Ramakrishna was a strict disciplinarian, and he had instructed Holy Mother to give Rakhal, Baburam, Latu, and other young disciples only two or three pieces of bread (chapatis) at night. But how can a mother put restrictions upon her children's food? So the Holy Mother gave the boys as many chapatis as they wanted. When Sri Ramakrishna objected to this on the ground that over-eating would spoil their midnight meditation, Holy Mother replied, 'Simply because they have eaten two more pieces of bread why do you worry? I shall take care of their future welfare.' The reply pleased the Master, for it assured him that the responsibility of the future monastic Order was in competent hands. Thus Sri Ramakrishna himself was the first to recognize the Holy Mother as the *sangha-janani*, 'Mother of the Order'. However, it was Swami Vivekananda who actually coined the term *sangha-janani* and gave currency to it. He said, 'This Order of ours — she [the Holy Mother] is its Guardian, Protectress; she indeed is the Mother of our Order.'

In fact, the establishment of the Ramakrishna Order came about in response to her earnest prayer. It is her boundless love that is circulating in the

Order as the stream of love holding together all its members. Right from the very inception of the Order the Holy Mother had firm faith in its greatness and future possibilities. Any utterance of hers was regarded as a command by the founding fathers of the Order. Everyone, from the world-renowned Swami Vivekananda to the most junior monk of the Order, was eager to follow Holy Mother's instructions. Once Swamiji dismissed the monastery cook for some good reason. The man went and took refuge at the feet of the Holy Mother. That evening when Swami Premananda went to see the Holy Mother, she asked him to take the man back. When Swamiji was told of this, he raised no objection. Once when there was some financial difficulty in conducting plague relief work in Calcutta, Swami Vivekananda even thought of selling Belur Math, but gave up the idea as Holy Mother disapproved of it. It was with Holy Mother's permission and in her name that Swamiji celebrated the worship of Durga in an image for the first time at Belur Math. And although Swamiji wanted to have the customary animal sacrifice performed, it was not done as the Holy Mother disapproved of it.

The Holy Mother took a lively interest in the day-to-day activities of the various centres of the Ramakrishna Order. She reproached the Head of the Koalpara Ashrama for being too authoritarian and calculating in his dealings with the inmates, and advised him to be loving to all. She stressed the importance of love as the binding force in the monastic community. When three of her disciples received sannyāsa ordination from her, she prayed to Sri Ramakrishna, 'Master, protect their (vow of) sannyāsa. Wherever they may be — on the hill, on the mountain, in the forest, or in the wilderness — provide them food.'

Holy Mother fully approved of Swami Vivekananda's introduction of work and social service as an essential part of monastic life. When a monk once told her about the view of some people that it was against the ideal of sannyāsa to run hospitals, keep accounts, etc., Holy Mother said in clear terms, 'If you don't work, with what will you occupy yourselves day and night? Is it possible to meditate all the twenty-four hours? Everything shall go on as the Master ordains. The Math will go on as it does now. Those who can't put up with this will clear out.' When the head of one ashrama complained to her that even well-to-do people came to their charitable dispensary, the Holy Mother advised him to keep the door of the dispensary open to all without any distinction. How much the welfare of the children of Sri Ramakrishna was in her

mind is clear from another incident. Once during the worship of Durga at Jayrambati, when all had departed after offering flowers at her feet, the Mother said to a brahmachārin, 'Bring more flowers, and offer them on behalf of Rakhal, Tarak, Sarada, Khoka, Yogen, and Gopal. Offer flowers on behalf of all my children — near and far, known and unknown.' It so happened that one of her monastic sons had to leave the Order. She gave him this consoling assurance, 'Can a mother ever forget her child? Know for certain that I am always at your side. Don't fear.' She always held high the ideal of sannyāsa before her sons. About a monk she said one day, 'Why should he live with a householder just because he is ill? There are Maths and Ashramas. A monk is a model of renunciation.' In all her decisions she kept in view the all-round welfare of the monastic Order. She herself arranged for the transfer of the ownership of Sri Ramakrishna's birthplace as well as her own to Belur Math.

Holy Mother had equal love for both monks and the laity. Even for those who were not her initiated disciples she had the same motherly love. She used to keep in mind the individual preferences and needs of her children. While serving food she always took care to give each person his favourite dish. Everyone felt that it was he or she whom the Holy Mother loved most. She used to pray for her initiated disciples in this way: 'O Lord, awaken their spiritual consciousness; grant them liberation; take care of their welfare here and hereafter. This world is full of sorrow and suffering. Please see that they won't have to come back to this world again.' Again: 'O Lord, I have so many children in different places. Please look after those whom I can't remember. Do all that is good for them.' Being a mother, she could take food only after all her children were fed. Once on her birthday her attendants forced her to take food first, but she could not eat more than a morsel of food. She said, 'Unless my children are fed, food won't go down my throat.' She observed no distinction in giving initiation. Brahmins, non-brahmins, weavers, hunters, railway porters, fallen women, Christians, Parsees — for all she kept the door to spirituality open.

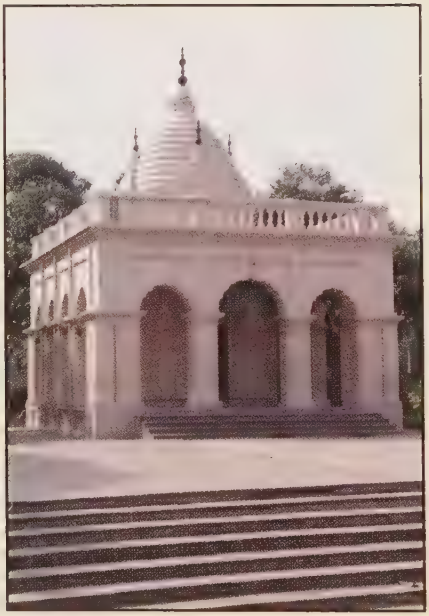
Her monastic disciples were special objects of her divine love. What Swami Virajananda felt after he had met her only for a short time, he has recorded as follows: 'In this way she would snatch away one's mind and heart and make herself dearer than one's own self. At home I used to love my mother very much and she too loved me so much. But Holy Mother is my mother not

Holy Mother's temple at Jayrambati

Koalpara Jagadamba Ashrama where Holy Mother used to stay

'Mother's House' at Baghbazar, Calcutta

Holy Mother at Jayrambati



Holy Mother's temple at Belur Math

for this birth alone; she is my eternal Mother.' After her sannyāsi disciples had finished their meal, she herself would remove their plates and clean the place. And if any of them tried to dissuade her from the act, she would reply with disarming simplicity: 'I am their mother. If a mother does not do such things for her children, who else would?' Once when the Holy Mother was staying at Koalpara, a brahmachārin fell ill at Jayrambati. He became indifferent to food. Holy Mother sent for him. For fear of passing the infection on to her, he stood at a distance and talked to her. But Holy Mother made him sit near her and affectionately stroked his body. Holy Mother never called any of her sannyāsin children by their monastic names. 'That is because I am their mother; it breaks my heart to think of their renouncing all', she would explain. A monk once asked the Holy Mother how she looked upon them. Holy Mother answered: 'I look upon you as Narayana and also as my sons.' The unique combination of mother and nun in Holy Mother's life enabled her to play a vital part in the growth of the Ramakrishna Order. Although she had no children of the flesh, she had many of the spirit. These children looked to her for nourishment and protection; and she guided them through her motherly heart and her insight into the purpose of Sri Ramakrishna's mission.

She was in no way less the mother of householders. One householder devotee asked her, 'I call you Mother, but I want to know whether you are really my own mother.' The Holy Mother replied, 'Am I not your own mother? Certainly I am your own mother.' A woman once saw her son eating with gusto in the Holy Mother's presence whereas he never did so in his own home. When she mentioned this, the Holy Mother said with a mother's pride, 'Don't cast aspersions on my son. I am a mendicant woman. Whatever food I give my children they eat it with relish.'

One day a lady devotee came to see her, walking all the way in the hot sun. Holy Mother with great tenderness started fanning her. Another lady, who was a *vaidya* by caste, one day brought some dishes cooked by herself. It was not customary for brahmins to eat food cooked by non-brahmins, so one of the Holy Mother's nieces blurted out, 'You ask for such things, that is why she brings them.' To this Holy Mother replied, 'She is my daughter; should I not ask her for such things?'

The baby of a woman devotee once soiled the floor, and the Holy Mother cleaned the place with her own hands. 'Why should I not do it?', remarked the

Holy Mother. 'Is she a stranger?' A young man with a blot on his character used to visit Holy Mother at Jayrambati. Everybody requested Holy Mother to forbid his coming to the village. Holy Mother's sorrowful response was: 'Being a mother, how can I ask him not to come? Such an injunction will never come from my lips.' Owing to unfortunate circumstances some devotees had to return to their homes. Holy Mother was seen praying: 'Please, O Lord, be gracious towards them. Protect my children.' A devotee was in a state of customary impurity, and hence hesitated to take food at the Mother's home. She told him, 'What is the harm in it, my son? I am your mother. I am serving you. There is no such restriction here.'

Mother's All-Embracing Love

In 1911 Holy Mother visited Madras in response to the earnest request of Swami Ramakrishnananda. The people there could not follow Bengali, nor could Holy Mother follow their language. But when she gave initiation to them, there was no need for an interpreter. Holy Mother herself taught them the mantra, how to do japa and meditation, etc., and they understood everything. It was as if there was an eternal relationship between them. From Madras Holy Mother went to Bangalore. One day Swami Vishuddhananda took her out to visit a nearby temple. When they returned to the Ashrama, they found the courtyard filled with devotees. As Holy Mother got down from the carriage, they all prostrated before her en masse. Moved by the sight, Holy Mother stood in silence for a few minutes with her right arm extended in benediction. The whole atmosphere was charged with a mystic silence. Then Holy Mother walked into the prayer hall of the ashrama and sat there. The devotees also sat all around her. There was complete silence. Holy Mother then expressed her sorrow at not being able to speak to them. But the devotees said in one voice, 'No, no; this is all right. Our hearts are full. No words are needed on such an occasion.' The communication barrier between Holy Mother and her children had been overcome through the universal language of the heart.

Holy Mother's all-embracing love was not restricted to the people of India alone. Her great Mother-heart knew no geographical barriers and embraced in its universal sweep people of all nations, races, and cultures. During

India's freedom struggle when anti-British feelings ran high, Holy Mother said with spontaneous, unassuming breadth of vision, 'They [the British people] also are my children.' And this remark she made in spite of the fact that quite a number of her disciples were engaged in anti-government and even revolutionary activities. In her were combined the equality of vision of a spiritually illumined soul and the equality of love of a mother.

When Swami Vivekananda's Western disciples — Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss Josephine MacLeod, Sister Nivedita, and Sister Christine — came to Calcutta, Holy Mother immediately accepted them as her own children and made them feel at home in their new environment. Sister Devamata and another lady from Poland who came to her later on had the same experience of maternal affection and identification. Even at the very first meeting with Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss MacLeod, and Nivedita, the Holy Mother made them feel that they had their place on her lap. In order to remove from their minds any hesitation, she ate with them. This evidently gave much relief to Swamiji who exclaimed in joy, 'Isn't that wonderful!' Sister Christine and Sister Devamata also had an equal share of Holy Mother's love. For them also she was 'our own Mother'. It was at the earnest request of Mrs. Bull that the Holy Mother allowed her photo to be taken at Nivedita's Bosepara house. At first Holy Mother had not agreed to her proposal. But when she said, 'Mother, I will take it [the photo] to America and worship it', Holy Mother could not ignore her daughter's sincere wish. This photo, which is now being worshipped everywhere, was the first photo of the Holy Mother ever taken.

Josephine MacLeod was overwhelmed by Holy Mother's love. She used to say, 'Sarada Devi is endowed with divine insight', and 'Sarada Devi is the Madonna, Mother Mary, of this new religious community.' One night Miss MacLeod was returning to her dwelling place after paying her respects to Holy Mother at the Udbodhan. With her was a brahmachārin carrying a lantern and showing her the way. She walked wrapped in thought and muttering to herself, 'I have seen her, I have seen her.' Suddenly she became aware of the brahmachārin's presence and, in a mood of exultation, whispered to him, 'The Holy Mother! I have seen her.'

Among the Western women devotees it was Sister Nivedita who had the closest contact with Holy Mother. Once she wrote to the Holy Mother that when she prayed to Virgin Mary, Sri Sarada Devi's form flashed in her mind.

In the same letter she added, 'Surely, you are the most wonderful thing of God -- Sri Ramakrishna's own chalice of love for the world — a token left with his children, in these lonely days, and we should be very still and quiet before you.' In her great work, *The Master as I Saw Him*, Sister Nivedita wrote about the Holy Mother: 'In her one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness which the simplest of women may attain. And yet, to me the stateliness of her courtesy and her open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood.' Again, in another letter Nivedita wrote: 'She really is, under the simplest, most unassuming guise, one of the strongest and greatest of women.'

Sister Christine, who worked with Nivedita at the latter's school, was also equally fortunate to receive the Holy Mother's love. When, a few days after Nivedita's untimely death, Sister Christine visited the Holy Mother, she remarked: 'Alas! They two lived together. Now it will be so sad for her to live alone.' Sister Devamata, who was a disciple of Swami Paramananda, was another favourite Western daughter of the Holy Mother. About her first meeting with the Mother, the Sister wrote: 'I... found Holy Mother alone in a room behind the shrine and laid myself and my offerings at her feet. She repeated my name twice with tender surprise. Then she placed her hand in blessing on my head. At her touch a spring of new life seemed to bubble up from my innermost heart and flood my being.' There was no need for an interpreter, for Holy Mother communicated in the language of the heart. Devamata had the capacity to understand the unique greatness of the Holy Mother. She wrote: 'Unbounded was her tender concern for every living thing. No human being could contain it. All alike were her children. Hers was an all-embracing mother-heart which wrapped itself in love about every child, and her family was the human race.'

The Holy Mother could adapt herself to the customs of different kinds of people. One summer afternoon a European lady came to see her. Saying, '*esho*' (come), the Holy Mother stretched her hand in the European manner and caught hold of the woman's chin with her hand, which is the Indian equivalent of a kiss. The woman's daughter was ill, and so she had come to seek the Holy Mother's benediction. Holy Mother blessed her whole-heartedly, and the woman's daughter recovered. Later on, the woman took initiation from Holy Mother. Thus Sri Sarada Devi was the Mother of even people belonging to other nations; none was a 'foreigner' to her.

She was the Mother of doctors as well. At different times during her life and at different places — Jayrambati, Koalpara, Calcutta — she had been under the treatment of at least a dozen doctors who followed different systems of medicine — allopathic, homoeopathic, and ayurvedic. Among them Dr. Bipin Behari Ghosh and Dr. Satish Chakravarti (brother of Swami Saradananda) were devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Others, like Drs. Kanjilal, Sajani Babu, Lalbihari Sen, and Swami Maheswarananda, were initiated disciples of the Holy Mother. That the Holy Mother should love them all as her own children is only natural. But it is indeed remarkable that she should extend the same love to a stranger, Dr. Prandhan Bose, who was a Christian and one of the most distinguished physicians of Calcutta in those days. The event happened during the Mother's last illness. Dr. Bose had to be brought in a taxi and had to be paid sixteen rupees per visit. He accepted the amount on the first few days. When he went downstairs, plenty of sweets, fruits, and flowers were sent to the car at Holy Mother's instruction. The doctor was touched by the love and kindness shown by the Holy Mother. The next day he asked Swami Saradananda, 'Whom have I been treating all these days?' When Saradananda told him the facts, his attitude changed. From that day the doctor stopped charging his fee and, even when the treatment was changed after few days, he continued to come every day, paying the taxi fare himself, in order to enquire after his former patient. The renowned physicians Dr. Nilratan Sarkar and Dr. Suresh Chandra Bhattacharya also had occasions to experience Holy Mother's love. Kaviraj Rajendranath Sen, Kaviraj Shyamadas Vachaspati, and Kaviraj Kalibhushan Sen were some of the outstanding physicians of the Indian system of medicine who had the privilege of treating the Holy Mother. Whenever they came, Holy Mother would personally see to it that they were given plenty of mangoes, sweets, etc. as gifts.

Holy Mother was the Mother of actors and actresses too. Among them, Binode Behari Shom (known popularly as 'Padmabinod'), as a student in M's school, received the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna. He attained fame for his acting in 'Prafulla', 'Macbeth', and other plays, but was addicted to heavy drinking. Every night on his way home, fully drunk, he would call loudly to his *dost* (friend) Swami Saradananda. At the orders of the Swami, nobody in Holy Mother's house responded to him. One night Padmabinod started singing with great fervour the song beginning with 'O compassionate Mother, wake

up. Open the door of your cottage....' Hearing this beautiful song, which expressed the pathetic cry of a forlorn child for its mother, the Holy Mother could not contain herself. She got up, rolled up the blinds, and opened the window. The drunken man saw this and exclaimed with joy: 'Have you got up, Mother? Have you heard your son's call? Now accept this salutation of mine.' So saying, he began to roll on the street. Then singing the refrain of another song with a dig at his *dost*, Padmabinod went away overjoyed at the kindness of Holy Mother. The whole episode was re-enacted on more than one occasion.

At the invitation of Girish Chandra Ghosh, Holy Mother went to his theatre, as Sri Ramakrishna had earlier done, to see the plays *Bilvamangal*, *Pāṇḍava-gaurav*, and one or two others. Once Girish, unable to bear the sufferings of life, approached the Holy Mother for permission to renounce the world. He used all his logical skill to convince Holy Mother, but she remained unmoved and did not allow him to become a sannyāsin. When the Holy Mother visited Girish's home during one Durga Puja, all actors and actresses of his theatre came to touch her holy feet and receive her blessings. Once, at the instance of the actor Aparesh Mukhopadhyay, Holy Mother went to Minerva theatre to see the play *Ramanuja*. The actress Niradasundari played an important role in it. After the play the Holy Mother wanted to meet her, and the actress came hurriedly to her, still wearing her dress and make-up. Holy Mother took her daughter to her bosom. This overwhelmed the poor actress who had never received such pure and genuine affection in her life.

Another renowned actor Amritalal openly declared that the Holy Mother was the main source of inspiration for his acting. In a poem he wrote: 'Infusing power in the hearts of people, wielding freely the pen (of destiny), you have taught the song of divine sport to so many.' Once the actress Tarasundari came to Udbodhan to meet the Holy Mother. At the Mother's instance she impersonated a male character in the drama *Janā* and entertained the ladies with her acting. The Holy Mother treated her as her own daughter. Another actress, Tinkori, who played the role of a crazy woman in *Bilvamangal*, also used to come to the Holy Mother. Once Holy Mother wanted to hear her sing, and she sang the song of the crazy woman which began with, 'Lead me by holding my hand.' Holy Mother was deeply moved by the soulful song, and exclaimed to the actress, 'My daughter, what a wonderful song you have sung.' Whenever these women, who were looked down upon by the cultured society, came,

Holy Mother would personally see that they were fed sumptuously and she would give them *pān* (betel roll) with her own hands.

The actor Aparesh Chandra has written: 'Ordinary people look at only the outer cover; God looks at the inner stuff. And it is precisely because God alone sees the inner life of man that I myself have been able to see this fact: the compassion of the Holy Mother of all the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, my beloved Holy Mother who took on to her lap fallen women, the actresses of theatres — that compassion does not honour any rule or law, that compassion does not discriminate between the fit and unfit, the thorny thistle and flowering herb, but purifies, sanctifies, and divinizes whomsoever it touches.'

A young initiated disciple of the Holy Mother belonged to the low caste of *yugis*. So he hesitated to move freely in Holy Mother's home at Jayrambati. This did not escape the notice of Holy Mother. One day she said to him: 'Why do you hesitate just because you are a *yugi*? What of that, my son? You belong to the Master's fold. You are a child of his family, and so think that you have just come to your own family.' The Holy Mother's use of the term of endearment, *ghorer chele* (child of the family), shows how close she could make herself to even people belonging to lower castes. On another occasion, during the auspicious second day of the Durga Puja, devotees started offering flowers at her feet. One man, however, stood aloof. Holy Mother learnt that he had come from Tajpore and belonged to the lowly *bagdi* caste. She asked him graciously to offer flowers, and he cheerfully complied.

When Holy Mother was staying at Kamarpukur (soon after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna), a maid servant known as 'Sagar's mother' used to do shopping and some odd jobs for her. Holy Mother used to keep aside a portion of lunch that she cooked, and when Sagar's mother would come, she would hand it over to her saying, 'Put this in your mouth first and drink some water, and then begin your work.' When the Holy Mother was at the Koalpara Jagadamba Ashrama, a woman who belonged to the lowly *dome* caste sought her help. She had been abandoned by the man with whom she had been living. Holy Mother sent for the man and reprimanded him in a gentle voice. 'She has sacrificed everything for your sake,' she told him, 'and you too have accepted her service so far. Now if you abandon her, you will be committing a great sin, and you won't get refuge even in hell.' These words, charged with Mother-

Power, brought about a change in the man and he accepted the woman once again.

The Holy Mother's attendant Swami Saradeshananda has written: 'At Holy Mother's house [in Jayrambati] servants, farm-hands, cartmen, palanquin-bearers, pedlars, fishermen, fishmongers, whoever went there, everyone of them was Holy Mother's son or daughter. They all got the same loving attention as did the devotees and disciples. That compassionate, loving look of the Holy Mother nobody can forget either in this world or in the next. Even if one forgets it for some time, as soon as difficulties arise in life, that tender look will flash in one's mind once again.' Sri Sarada Devi was thus the Mother of the lowly and the downtrodden.

Holy Mother's love was not restricted to human beings alone; it embraced all living beings. She regarded herself as the Mother of cats, parrots, etc. — not in a metaphorical sense, nor in an artificial way. It was natural and spontaneous like the air that she breathed. She could not bear to see even a cat being ill-treated. Radhu had a pet cat which used to remain at Holy Mother's feet free from all fear. She would set aside one cup of milk for it every day. The cat, however, used to break into the kitchen and eat things stealthily. Some of the disciples of the Holy Mother would give the cat a beating, which pained Mother very much. She would say, 'Stealing is its inborn nature, my son. Who will feed it with love and care?' Once while leaving for Calcutta, she told Brahmachāri Jñān: 'Look, Jñān, don't beat the cat; I am the Indwelling One in them also.' There was in Holy Mother's house a talking mynah by the name Gangaram. Holy Mother herself daily washed it, gave it water and food, and cleaned its cage. Whenever Gangaram cried, 'Mother, O Mother', Holy Mother would immediately go to the bird with food and water, for the bird's call meant that it was hungry.

It is true that Holy Mother got a foretaste of motherhood even during her stay with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar by mothering the young disciples of the Master — Latu, Rakhal, Baburam, Purna, and others. But her heart was not satisfied. When she was living alone at Kamarpukur, the thought would occur to her, 'I have no son, and nothing else; what will be my lot?' One day the Master appeared to her in a vision and said: 'Why do you worry? You want one son, but I have left for you all these jewels of sons. In time many will call you "Mother".'

On an earlier occasion, when the Holy Mother's mother Shyamasundari Devi lamented in Sri Ramakrishna's hearing that her daughter will not hear anyone addressing her as 'Mother', the Master told her: 'Dear Mother-in-law, you need have no disappointment on that score. The time will come when so many children will call her "Mother" that she will be unable to stand it — you will see this.' These prophetic words of the Master came to be literally true. Men and women, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, monks and lay-people, saints and sinners — hundreds of them thronged to the Holy Mother. For those souls scorched by the midday sun of worldly suffering, she acted as the cool moonlight. Their suffering became hers. The cry of suffering humanity followed her wherever she went. She did everything in her power to relieve the suffering of people. She gave everyone refuge in her lap and suffered vicariously for them. The world has never seen love of this magnitude and intensity. That love knew no distinctions, no bounds. It was pure, unconditional, and ever free. It asked nothing in return but gave itself freely to one and all.

Here is a wonderful new phenomenon. According to certain schools of Vaishnavism, Sri Krishna is not an Incarnation but the Lord Himself, the originator of all Incarnations. Sri Ramakrishna can be regarded as the Incarnation of the Divine Mother Kali. In that case, Mother Kali and Mother Sarada Devi may be regarded as one. If this view is accepted, then the Holy Mother becomes the originator of the Incarnation of the present age. This is, perhaps, the reason why in the new Incarnation, Sri Ramakrishna, one finds the predominance of so much modesty, sweetness, and the attempt to establish dharma through peaceful means, without any inclination to punish the wicked. This new Incarnation of Mother-Power redeems people by transforming their consciousness, by giving a Godward turn to their evil propensities, and hence there is no need to destroy the wicked.

So then, this is the new Gospel, the new Message, the new Hope for the modern age: this time the Divine Mother of the universe Herself has assumed the dual forms of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi to uplift humanity beyond the mirage of science and technology to the ocean of immortal bliss, to lead them along the path of truth to the Ultimate Reality and ultimate fulfilment. The boundless Motherhood, the inexhaustible Mother-Power, the limitless compassion and blessedness of the Divine Mother of the universe

has this time assumed the form of the Holy Mother. This is what makes Sri Sarada Devi the Mother of All.

The God of all, Sri Ramakrishna, used to climb to the roof of Rani Rasmani's house to call out to his future disciples. The Mother of all gave this assurance through the *Devī-sūkta*:

Aham rāṣṭrī saṅgamanī vasūnām
cikituṣī prathmā yajñiyānām;
Tām mā devāḥ vyadadhuḥ purutrā
bhūristhātrām bhūryāveśayantīm —

'I am the Queen Regnant of the whole universe, the Bestower of wealth, the Supreme Power and hence the Prime Object of all oblations. It is Me that the gods and sages worship in various ways. I manifest myself in myriad forms and exist in all beings as the Soul of all souls.'

It was this sublime, transcendental, supreme Truth of Divine Motherhood that the Holy Mother Sarada Devi tried to manifest in every small act of her life, unobtrusively, behind the veil of superhuman modesty. The pure love of her great mother-heart is now flooding the different quarters of the world; and her divine assurance, 'Always remember, my child, that you have a Mother,' has begun to reverberate even in the distant corners of the world. Glory to the Holy Mother!

Swami Vivekananda
THE ARCHITECT OF GLOBAL UNITY

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

The Modern Renaissance in India

In the nineteenth century, India started writing the first pages of what we may call her modern history. This was made possible by her contact with the West through the United Kingdom. At the beginning of this contact, India experienced a period of bewilderment and confusion. But as years passed, the Western leaven began to enter into the body and soul of India, stirring it to its depths. It created a ferment which soon issued forth as a national renaissance, gentle and halting in the beginning, but, gathering momentum and force as the century rolled on, becoming a mighty flood in the last decade of the century. This modern renaissance is infusing a new youthful vigour into the body and soul of India and achieving two national purposes: Firstly, the assimilation of the dynamic culture of the modern West, the reassessment of her own ancient heritage in the light of the total human legacy, the synthesis of the ancient and the modern in the world's heritage, and the ensuring, thus, of a dynamic national life and the thread of historic national continuity. Secondly, she is also re-entering, after a few centuries of immobilization, the mainstream of international life and thought and pouring out her quota of light and wisdom in the service of the rest of the world. It was these two purposes that she achieved through Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

Ramakrishna and the Indian Renaissance

Sri Ramakrishna's life span was barely fifty years, but it was an intense life devoted to the search for spiritual truth, in the first part, and its dissemination among eager seekers, in the second. Such an intense life which re-lives the spiritual life of a whole people is the most dynamic force in history. It ceases to be just an individual life and becomes a world-moving force.

The mass of spiritual energy which Sri Ramakrishna manifested in his lifetime did not vanish with the death of his body. Its power of impact has continued and will continue for centuries to come. Physical death has no significance in the case of personalities such as Sri Ramakrishna; they hardly lived in the physical plane even when they were alive. Each one of them is like an atom-smashing cyclotron which generates and holds immense energies within itself, the range and quality of which cannot be explained in terms of the size of the machine itself. Sri Ramakrishna's body was frail, but within that frail body was contained enormous energy — energy which was released by his penetration into the spiritual depths of his being. It was a mass of spiritual energy consisting of wisdom and purity, love and compassion. Sri Ramakrishna was ablaze with divinity. It was the play of this tremendous divine energy that was witnessed in a little room in the temple of Dakshineswar, near Calcutta, away from the rush and turmoil of the modern civilization which was centred in that city, the then capital of India. And yet, the energies released in the precincts of that temple had a powerful impact first on Calcutta, and later, on other parts of India and abroad. This diffusion was accomplished by his foremost disciple Swami Vivekananda, whose training and outlook were the opposite of his Master's and yet complementary to his, for which reason the Master chose him as his effective conduit. In the words of Romain Rolland:

> The great disciple whose task it was to take up the spiritual heritage of Ramakrishna and disseminate the grain of his thought throughout the world was both physically and morally his direct antithesis.[1]

A Profile of Narendra

Vivekananda's pre-monastic name was Narendranath Datta, Narendra or Naren, for short. Unlike Ramakrishna, whose wisdom and enlightenment owed nothing to institutional education, traditional or modern, Vivekananda was a

full-fledged modern youth in education and upbringing when he first met Ramakrishna towards the end of 1881. In his view and outlook, he represented young India in transition. India had, by then, been exposed to the powerful influence of modern Western culture for over half a century through the new education introduced by the British Government, which was avidly sought after by Indian youths. Modern science, Greco-Roman history, English literature, modern Western history, and modern socio-political thought opened the mind of India to the rich cultural heritage of the Western peoples and roused in it a mood of questioning, self-criticism, and a general spirit of restlessness. Narendra drank freely of this education; he was a keen student of Western thought with its scientific spirit and its philosophy of rationalism and humanism. This philosophy had already dominated the Western mind for nearly a hundred years, and now it found a fertile soil in India also. At college, Narendra was a handsome youth, intelligent, vivacious, and energetic. He was a keen physical culturist, a devotee of music, a student of science, and a lover of philosophy. He opened himself up to the influence of all the best elements in the Western heritage and became a dynamic representative of that heritage. He was a picture of strength and manliness; he possessed the Promethean spirit. And yet, this education and achievement did not satisfy his heart; it was restless with a nameless spiritual thirst and a yearning to realize truth. It was to quench this thirst that he went to Sri Ramakrishna.

His English and Indian professors as well as his fellow students were impressed by his intellectual brilliance. His English Principal, William Hastie, a great scholar, said of him:

> Narendranath is really a genius. I have travelled far and wide, but I have never yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities even in German Universities amongst philosophical students. He is bound to make his mark in his life.[2]

In spite of the intellectual agnosticism which modern education bred in him, he held fast to the ideals of purity and renunciation, which he had imbibed from his childhood days. He was a past master in meditation; and his passion for spiritual life grew with the years.

It was from a chance remark of Principal Hastie during a lesson on Wordsworth's poem, 'The Excursion', that Narendra heard the name of his

future Master for the first time. Explaining the poet's reference to trance, Principal Hastie had said that such religious ecstasies were the result of purity and concentration, that it was a rare phenomenon in modern times, and that he had known only one person who had experienced that blessed state, and that person was Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar.

Narendra's Search for Truth

Narendra soon realized the inadequacies of modern rationalism and humanism. Religion may have its faults; it may have blundered into dogmatism and intolerance; but it has a spiritual core which mankind cannot ignore without making itself poorer, he said to himself. The endeavours and conclusions of the sense-bound intellect cannot be the last word in man's search for truth. An intellectual approach to truth will end only in agnosticism, and often even in cynicism. But the whole being of man seeks to experience truth, to *realize* it. And he found that modern thought had no message to give to man on this theme. *This rising above rationalism to direct experience and realization, this growth of man from the sensate to the super-sensual dimension, is the special message of the Indian spiritual tradition*; and Ramakrishna embodied it in himself in its fullness.

Man may sharpen his reason and intellect, he may have the best of wealth and power, he may enjoy the delights of art and literature, yet his heart will continue to be a vacuum and a prey to tension and sorrow till he discovers his own spiritual dimension, till he realizes God. This is the testament of Indian thought. Says the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*:

> *Yadā carmavadākāśaṁ veṣṭayiṣyanti mānavāḥ*
> *Tadā devam avijñāya duḥkhasyānto bhaviṣyati —*

'Even if men [through their technical efficiency] were to roll up space like a piece of leather, they will not experience the end of sorrow without realizing God.'[3]

Vivekananda felt the pang of this vacuum in his heart as a university student. That made him restless; he could have silenced his heart's craving for truth, learnt to live with his intellectual agnosticism, and made the best of the world with his undoubted talents. But he was made of a different stuff, and

meant for a different role. His passion for truth would not allow him to compromise with a humdrum life. So like a 'hart that panteth after the water-brooks', in the words of the Psalm, his heart became restless for truth, and in this mood he went from place to place, from teacher to teacher, until an inexorable destiny took him to Sri Ramakrishna.

A Profile of Sri Ramakrishna

At the suggestion of a friend that he might get a satisfactory answer from Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda wended his way to the Dakshineswar temple on the left bank of the Ganga, where Ramakrishna lived in a small room facing the holy river. Ramakrishna was a strange person. He had passed through a stormy period of hankering and search for God and had realized Him, first through one path, then through another, until he traversed not only all the recognized paths of the Hindu religion, but also the paths of Christianity and Islam. He had realized that it is the same God that is worshipped in all religions and that 'the paths are many, but the goal is one'. This realization had made him universal in outlook and sympathy, with a deep love for man everywhere. He saw man in a new light, for he saw God in the hearts of all men. *He saw God both with his eyes closed and with his eyes open.* He was God-intoxicated and yet intensely human; with a smile on his face, he greeted every visitor and enfolded him in his pure love; and hundreds visited him — men and women, rich and poor, university students and pious householders, philosophers and artists, agnostics and holy men. He also, on his part, sought out the great and the holy. He conversed with all with infinite tenderness and sympathy. In the midst of serious conversations on God and spiritual life, a chance suggestion would send him into divine ecstasy. Coming down from that state, he would become simple and playful like a child, and enjoy much fun and frolic with his listeners, especially the young ones.

This combination of the divine and the human in him fascinated all who went to him, and his words held them in thrall. His room was a 'mart of joy', in the words of 'M', the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. 'When the lotus opens', Sri Ramakrishna used to tell his young listeners, by the means of a parable to illustrate the magnetic influence of a man of God, 'bees come to it from all quarters on their own accord to seek its honey; it has not to sent out

an invitation.' This was literally true in his own case. He had prayed to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, don't get any creeds expounded through my mouth.' They are, as Jesus had expressed it, as *stones* to a hungry man. What he gave to all seekers without distinction was the *bread* of spirituality. The main theme of his conversations was man growing spiritually through the manifestation of the Divine within. A procession of seekers, which included such distinguished men as the great religious leader of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshab Chandra Sen, went to him from Calcutta and nearby villages; it began as a trickle in 1875 and became a flood by the time he passed away in 1886.

Narendra at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna

The Master gave of his realizations to all who came to him. Each received according to his or her need and capacity. The central theme of all his talks was spirituality and the way to achieve it. He did not give the same teaching to any two seekers. No creed was expounded; no belief was criticized; but the spiritual life of the seeker was stimulated and deepened, and his vision and sympathy broadened. Thus he poured out a stream of truth and wisdom almost eighteen hours of the twenty-four. And to him went Narendra, his steps guided by divine destiny. Narendra asked the question which had been agitating his heart for years and for which he could not get any satisfactory answer from any teacher till then: 'Sir, have you seen God?' 'Yes, my boy, I have seen Him,' replied the Master with calm and loving assurance, and added: 'I see Him more intensely than I see you here; and you can also see Him.'

This was a new language indeed! It is difficult to express the powerful impact which these simple words made on the mind and heart of Narendra. He felt in the depth of his being that these words came from the depths of the Master's realization, and he decided to learn more of him and from him. Every day brought him to a clearer awareness of the profound spirituality of the Master and the significance of his life and realizations.

This training of Narendra at the hands of Sri Ramakrishna, by which the young, dynamic intellectual became a man of God, one who saw God in himself and in all beings, one who became, like his Master, universal in his sympathy for man in the East and the West, was a momentous chapter in modern history, fraught with great consequences for the future.

Vivekananda sitting at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna is an arresting phenomenon. No two people could have been more opposite in temperament, upbringing, and mental make-up than these two; and yet no two people have been so intimate and attuned to each other as these. One was the complement of the other, the Master continuing his being in the disciple and the disciple fulfilling the life-work and mission of the Master.

The Meeting of Two Masterminds

Ramakrishna represented the eternal soul of India, calm and majestic, 'with a unifying, pacifying love for all living things', in the words of Will Durant. In his Foreword to the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Mahatma Gandhi writes:

> The story of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness.... His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all who read the following pages.[4]

Vivekananda, on the other hand, represented the modern spirit of freedom and equality, manliness and energy in action. The intimate communion of the Master and the disciple demonstrated the basic unity of godliness and manliness. True godliness is the very consummation of manliness; true manliness, similarly, is an expression of godliness. As held in Indian spiritual thought, Narayana (God) is the *sakhā* (friend) of *nara* (man).

The meeting of these two souls witnessed the emergence of a glorious vision of truth, of a more perfect excellence of character than achieved hitherto in East or West, and the striving for universal human happiness and welfare. Knowledge is a powerful force. Love is another powerful force. The more universal and pure the knowledge and love, the more dynamic they become. In Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, knowledge and love shed all their limitations and became a mighty force — pure, positive, and dynamic.

The education of Vivekananda in universal vision and sympathy at the hands of his great Master is a fascinating theme for all students of education and religion. There are two landmarks in this education which I would like

specially to refer to. The first relates to the acceptance, by Vivekananda, after much struggle, of the truth of Shakti, the immanent aspect of Reality, the personal aspect of the impersonal Brahman; and the second relates to his acceptance of its positivistic corollary, namely, 'seeing God with eyes open', in the words of Sri Ramakrishna.

Narendra's Inner Conflicts

When he came to his Master, Narendra was a votary of the personal but formless God as presented in the Brahmo Samaj, of which he was then a member. He did not relish the idea of God either as the impersonal Absolute or as the personal Shakti, the one source of all nature and its energies. These two represented the age-old conflict between the two schools of *jñāna* (the path of the impersonal God) and *bhakti* (the path of the personal God), with the God of the Brahmo Samaj partaking of the abstractions of both. The first is the path of negation, while the second is the path of affirmation; the latter, in its full and robust form, involves also the path of *karma* or action. The differences in approach between these cannot and should not annul the unity of their common goal. But this was what happened in India in later ages, weakening both the paths and narrowing the minds of their followers. This had meant in effect that there were two Gods — one, that of the *jñāni*, and the other, that of the *bhakta*. The *jñāni* dismissed the world as maya, the God of the *bhakta* as a product of this maya, and the *bhakta* himself as a weak sentimentalist. The *bhakta*, on his part, dismissed the transcendent God of the *jñāni* as pure nothingness and the *jñāni* himself as a dry intellectual. The modern votaries of secular rationalism and scientific humanism, on the other hand, to whom the world itself is their god and reality, dismissed both the *jñāni* and the *bhakta* as vain dreamers and their gods as products of a pious wish fulfilment.

Into this murky atmosphere of contemporary thought came Sri Ramakrishna, who realized the fundamental unity of the God of the *jñāni* and the God of the *bhakta*, and the complementary character of the two paths of affirmation and negation.

Sri Ramakrishna gently educated Narendra in this unifying vision during the six years of his discipleship. In the early stages, Narendra reacted violently to the concept of the impersonal and formless Brahman, as he had all along

reacted to that of the personal God with form. To him and to many seekers of the personal God like him, the impersonal meant something inert and abstract, equivalent to the physicist's primordial nature, and the personal meant crude anthropomorphism and superstition. Sri Ramakrishna slowly made him understand the *spiritual* character of the impersonal Absolute through a convincing presentation of the philosophy of the path of negation. Brahman as the *Self* of all beings cannot be impersonal in the sense in which scientists present nature, or the cosmic dust, or the cosmic background material. Neither can Brahman, the one behind the many, be a person to be designated either as masculine or feminine; hence the preference of the neuter term 'It' to describe Brahman. The path to It is the path of negation, the path of *neti, neti* (not this, not this). By negating all objects and entities, all predicates and concepts, and even the ego, as belonging to the world of maya, the seeker approaches Brahman as the transcendental Absolute, the Unconditioned, 'from which all speech and thought recoil, not being able to grasp It', the experience of which is best expressed only through silence. Sri Ramakrishna had earlier followed this path under the guidance of his guru, Totapuri, and attained its consummation in the experience of *nirvikalpa samādhi*.

Narendra and the Critical Spirit in Religion

Before meeting Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna had been heard to pray: 'O Mother, send me someone who will doubt my realizations.' Narendra's arrival at Dakshineswar signified the granting of this prayer. He was unlike all the other disciples. A staunch follower of the Brahmo Samaj cult of the personal God without form, he could not tolerate the worship of the personal God through various forms upheld in the Hindu religion and practiced by his own Master, Sri Ramakrishna. He used to criticize even Sri Ramakrishna's visions of divine forms and his worship of Kali, the Divine Mother. Narendra also criticized other fellow disciples for bowing down to Her. Sri Ramakrishna's reaction to this critical and even hostile attitude and conduct of his disciple was unusual and refreshingly modern. He told Narendra, 'Do not accept anything because I say so. Test everything for yourself.' Further, the Master told him, 'Test me as the money changers test their coins.' This unique relationship is revealed in the following passage:

The liberty which Narendranath enjoyed in his association with Sri Ramakrishna was unusual, as will be gathered from the following incident. He often argued with the Master against image-worship. One day, when the latter could not convince him, he said: 'Why do you come here if you won't acknowledge my Mother?' Narendra replied: 'Must I accept Her simply because I come here?' 'All right', said the Master, 'ere long you shall not only acknowledge my blessed Mother, but weep in Her name.'[5]

Unity of the Impersonal and the Personal

Instructing the Brahmo Samaj leader Vijay Krishna Goswami in the dual nature of God as with form and without form, Sri Ramakrishna said:

That which is Brahman is also Kali, the Mother, the Primal Energy. When inactive It is called Brahman. Again, when creating, preserving, and destroying, It is called Shakti. Still water is an illustration of Brahman. The same water, moving in waves, may be compared to Shakti, Kali.... She is formless and, again, She has forms. If you believe in the formless aspect, then meditate on Kali as that. If you meditate on any aspect of Her with firm conviction, She will let you know Her true nature. Then you will realize that not merely does God exist, but He will come near you and talk to you as I am talking to you. Have faith and you will achieve everything. Remember this, too. If you believe that God is formless, then stick to that belief with firm conviction. But don't be dogmatic: never say emphatically about God that He can be only this and not that. You may say: 'I believe that God is formless. But He can be many things more. He alone knows what else He can be. I do not know; I do not understand.' How can man with his one ounce of intelligence know the real nature of God? Can you put four seers of milk in a one-seer jar? If God, through His grace, ever reveals Himself to His devotee and makes him understand, then he will know; but not otherwise.[6]

Narendra's Education in the Vision of the Impersonal God

Sri Ramakrishna led Narendra slowly and steadily to this truly Advaitic (non-dual) vision of the impersonal-personal God. Apart from instruction and

discourse, his powerful spiritual influence helped to soften the hold of one or two obstinate dogmas in Narendra's mind and make it a free and untrammelled instrument for the vision of Truth and his mission for humanity.

Sri Ramakrishna knew in his heart of hearts that Narendra would eventually grasp the truth of the unconditioned Brahman. He made him read books like *Aṣṭāvakra Samhitā* on the subject. To Narendra's mind, trained in the theology of the Brahmo Samaj, these writings appeared to be heretical. He would often rebel saying, 'It is blasphemy, for there is no difference between such philosophy and atheism. There is no greater sin in the world than to think of oneself as identical with the Creator. I am God, you are God, these created things are God — what can be more absurd than this? The sages who wrote such things must have been insane.' Sri Ramakrishna, amused at the bluntness of his disciple but desiring to lead him to a more comprehensive spiritual vision, would gently admonish him: 'You may not accept the views of these seers. But how can you abuse them or limit God's infinitude? Go on praying to the God of truth and believe in that aspect of His which He reveals to you.'

Narendra's Experience of Nirvikalpa Samādhi

One day the Master tried to bring home to Narendra the identity of Atman, the Self of man, with Brahman, the Self of the Universe, but could not convince him. Narendra went out of the room and discussed the topic with Hazra, another devotee of Sri Ramakrishna; and amidst derisive laughter, both dismissed the teaching as preposterous. Hearing the laughter, Sri Ramakrishna came out of his room in a semiconscious state and, touching Narendra, went into samādhi. That holy touch revolutionized Narendra's mind. He began to see and realize that there was nothing but God in the universe. In the words of Narendra, closing his narration of the incident:

> This state of things continued for some days. When I became normal again, I realized that I must have had a glimpse of the Advaita state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth, I could not deny the conclusions of the Advaita philosophy.[7]

During the last years of Sri Ramakrishna's life, we find Narendra consumed with a raging spiritual passion and seeking with restless yearning for this very experience of Brahman from the Master.

Romain Rolland, quoting from a letter written to him by Swami Shivananda, a fellow disciple of Narendra, on 7 December 1927, described Narendra's realization thus:

> One day, Swami Shivananda told me, he was present in the garden of Cossipore, near Calcutta, when Naren really attained this state. 'Seeing him unconscious, his body as cold as that of a corpse, we ran in great agitation to the Master and told him what had happened. The Master showed no anxiety; he merely smiled and said: "Very well", and then relapsed into silence. Naren returned to outward consciousness and came to the Master. The Master said to him: "Well, now do you understand? This (highest realization) will henceforward remain under lock and key. You have the Mother's work to do. When it is finished, She will undo the lock." Naren replied, "Master, I was happy in samādhi. In my infinite joy, I had forgotten the world. I beseech you to let me remain in that state!" "For shame!" cried the Master. "How can you ask such things? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man!... This realization will become so natural to you by the grace of the Mother that, in your normal state, you will realize the One Divinity in all beings; you will do great things in the world; you will bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor."'[8]

Sri Ramakrishna's Integral Message

The philosophic and spiritual vision which Ramakrishna imparted to Vivekananda had a profound impact on the subsequent career of the latter and the history of modern India. For it soon began to translate itself into action with a pervasive sweep, unprecedented in the five-thousand-year history of India. As it unifies the divergent approaches of affirmation and negation, of Shakti and Brahman, it also synthesizes the diverse paths of action and contemplation, work and worship, the secular and the sacred, in a comprehensive spirituality. In it, Godward passion pours out also as man-ward love and service. 'By their fruits ye shall know them', said Jesus about the truth or, otherwise, of man's ideological convictions. Such convictions have produced, as history has shown, in religious, political, and other fields of human life,

character-fruits of diverse quality, from the sweetest to the bitterest, with any number of strands in between. Apathetic withdrawal or energetic action, pessimistic resignation or optimistic struggle, egoistic self-assertion or spiritual self-denial, intolerance or universal acceptance, violence and aggressiveness or non-violence and gentleness, universal love or blind hatred, selfishness and exploitation or renunciation and service — all these are the character-fruits of man's philosophies, well thought-out or ill.

Sri Ramakrishna has coined a new term for this comprehensive philosophic and spiritual vision, namely, *vijñāna*. The fruit of this *vijñāna* in a character signifies the rare synthesis of the virtues and grace of the cultures of the East and the West. This was the extraordinary achievement in the character and personality of Swami Vivekananda. This explains the unprecedented sweep and range of his energy resources. This alone explains also his tremendous intensity and the explosive impact of his brief ten-year ministry. Vivekananda was the supreme example of what Herbert Spencer characterized as uniting philanthropic energy with philosophic calm,[9] which, in Vedantic terminology, means the union of Shakti and Shiva, or Kali and Brahman.

The Empowering of Vivekananda

Sri Ramakrishna, the man, passed away in 1886. But Sri Ramakrishna, the Power, all-beneficent and luminous, continued, and still continues, to affect in a fundamental way the life and destiny of man in increasing numbers in the East and the West. Before he passed away, he felt the need for an organization, which would be an effective channel for the flow of his unifying vision to fertilize human life everywhere. And he set up such an organization, a *sangha*, with Vivekananda at its head. His deep concern to see that the organization remained intact is evident in his exhortation, a few days before his passing away, to Vivekananda to see that his young disciples were held together in a common dedication to the vision that he had imparted to them. To quote the biography of Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western disciples:

> It so happened that Naren had been called to the side of the Master some days earlier, when he was suffering intensely and could scarcely speak. The Master wrote on a piece of paper: 'Narendra will teach others.' Naren

hesitated and said: 'I won't do that'. But the Master replied, '*You shall have to do it.*'...

Now that the last days were approaching, the Master set himself with greater energy than ever to mould, in a calm and silent way, the spiritual way, the spiritual life of these boys, particularly that of Naren. Every evening he would call Naren to his room and, for two or three hours at a time, would impart final instructions to him on various spiritual subjects and advise him to keep his brother disciples together, how to guide and train them so that they would be able to live the life of renunciation.[10]

The Founding of a New Monastic Order

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, in obedience to his ardent wish, fifteen of his young disciples (one more joined them some years later) under the leadership of Vivekananda formed a new type of monastic brotherhood which was unique in many respects. At first, with the meagre financial support of one or two householder devotees, they lived in a dilapidated house in a place called Baranagore. They did not have enough food or clothes and they slept on straw mats spread on the floor. Most of their time was spent in meditation and studies.

It was this austere, contemplative form of monastic life that Swami Vivekananda was to transform later on into one of the noblest, most progressive and dynamic monastic Orders in the world, with the motto, 'For one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world' (*ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca*). But between that transformation and the founding there was a time-lag of a decade which was filled with momentous events.

Vivekananda's Experience of the Real India

After staying at the Baranagore monastery for three years, Vivekananda spent another three years travelling all over India as a mendicant monk. He walked hundreds of miles. It was during these travels that Swamiji saw the real India — utter poverty, ignorance, and backwardness everywhere, but, in the midst of all that, there still remained undying the flame of spirituality.

Vivekananda clearly understood that the main cause of the degradation of India was the neglect of the poor masses and women. It was not the ancient

religion of the land that was the cause of India's backwardness. On the contrary, religion formed the backbone of Indian culture, and so the only way to rejuvenate India was to awaken the minds of the poor and the oppressed to the enlightening, life-giving principles of the eternal religion.

Although he upheld the supremacy of the Indian ideal of spirituality in his life and teaching, Vivekananda was appalled to see the poverty and the degradation of the masses of his countrymen; and he proclaimed in anguish, 'I do not believe in a religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth!' He also quoted his Master's pungent words, 'Religion is not for empty bellies.' For the first time in her long history, India got an outstanding spiritual leader who could tackle vigorously the pressing problems of the secular life of man, and plead for what he termed a 'toned down' materialism for his country. He traced the downfall of India to the forcing down the throats of one and all the mystical heights of religion with its neglect of social feeling and action and its emphasis only on renunciation and contemplation.

Vivekananda is the first monk and outstanding spiritual teacher in history to uphold, without any reservation, the cause of women and the common people. 'In India there are two evils', he said, 'trampling on the women and grinding the poor through caste restrictions.' Revealing his resolve to undo this injustice, Sister Nivedita writes:

> Our Master, at any rate, regarded the Order to which he belonged as one whose lot was cast for all time with the cause of Women and the People.... It was the one thought, too, with which he would turn to the disciple at his side, whenever he felt himself nearer than usual to death, in a foreign country, alone, 'Never forget!' he would then say, 'the word is "Woman and the people!"'[11]

Vivekananda's Mission to the West

In the course of his wanderings somewhere in the western part of India, Swami Vivekananda heard about the World's Parliament of Religions to be held in Chicago in 1893. Several of his friends and admirers urged him to attend the Parliament. It was probably during his three-day meditation on the rock at Kanyakumari that his whole future mission became clear to him.

Swamiji's going to the West had a twofold purpose. He already had in his mind a nation-wide scheme for the uplift of the poor and downtrodden masses of India, and he decided to seek financial assistance in the West. But he did not wish to go there merely for material benefits. He saw that the West stood in need of the wealth of India — spiritual knowledge and wisdom, and he had been divinely chosen to fulfil that need.

The World's Parliament of Religions afforded an opportunity to fulfil both these plans of Swami Vivekananda, and so he decided to attend the Parliament. But as later events showed, the idea of collecting funds for his Indian work did not work out well, and Swamiji's main work in the West became the dissemination of India's spiritual knowledge and eternal values. Swami Vivekananda thus became India's first cultural emissary to the West.

When we speak of Swami Vivekananda going forth as India's emissary to the West, we have to keep in view the above significant factors, which had two important bearings on his Mission: First, he was not being sent abroad by a free political Indian State, for India was then lying under the heavy weight of British political subjection. Second, he was not being sent abroad by a central Indian religious authority or church, for the Indian spiritual traditions, with their emphasis on freedom to experiment and experience, did not permit the development of an all-powerful church or an authoritarian central creed, finished and final. This latter phenomenon was to cause serious difficulties for Swami Vivekananda in gaining admission as a delegate to the Chicago Parliament of Religions, and which he was to overcome by the compelling force of his personality. He was sent abroad by the *expanding spiritual consciousness of India* in its wholeness, through the instrumentality of a group of nationally sensitive Indian people. He had told his devoted disciple, Alasinga Perumal, who was the head of the group of youths in Madras constituting a committee, to raise subscriptions for the Swami's voyage to the West: 'If it is the Mother's will that I go, then let me receive the money from the people! Because it is for the people of India that I am going to the West — for the people and the poor!'[12]

Vivekananda's Early Trials and Hardships in America

Swami Vivekananda left Bombay by steamer on 31 May 1893 and, passing through Colombo, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Canton, Nagasaki, Kobe,

Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, and Yokohama, he landed at Vancouver and thence reached Chicago by train by the middle of July 1893. From then on until his first speech at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago on 11 September 1893, he had to face many hardships and moments of despair. Referring to the initial difficulties which this emissary of India had to face, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* says:

> Burdened with unaccustomed possessions, not knowing where to go, conspicuous because of his strange attire, annoyed by the lads who ran after him in amusement, weary and confused by the exorbitant charges of the porters, bewildered by the crowds, chiefly visitors to and from the World's Fair, he sought a hotel. When the porters had brought his luggage and he was at last alone and free from interruptions, he sat down amidst his trunks and satchels and tried to calm his mind.[13]

More difficulties and disappointments lay ahead. The rudest shock came when he learnt from the Parliament's Information Bureau that the sessions were to commence only in September, that none could be admitted as a delegate without proper credentials from an organization in India, and that even the time for such admission had gone by. Nothing illustrates the unorganizedness of Hinduism better than the manner of this going forth of Vivekananda. He wondered why he had been so foolish as to have listened to those 'sentimental school boys' of Madras, who were ignorant of the necessary steps to be taken in order to get anyone admitted as a delegate! In the words of Sister Nivedita:

> To their unbounded faith, it never occurred that they (the disciples) were demanding what was, humanly speaking, impossible. They thought that Vivekananda had only to appear and he would be given his chance. The Swami himself was as simple in the ways of the world as these his disciples; and when he was once sure that he was divinely called to make the attempt, he could see no difficulties in the way. Nothing could have been more typical of the unorganizedness of Hinduism itself than this going forth of its representative unannounced, and without formal credentials, to enter the strongly-guarded doors of the world's wealth and power.[14]

Added to this desperate situation was the other worry of a lean purse. But in spite of all these trials and hardships, he was determined not to give up, but

to make every attempt to succeed in America; if he failed there, he would try in England, and if he failed there too, he would go back to India and wait for further commands from God.

Divine Help through Distinguished Americans

The true monk that he was, Swami Vivekananda was entirely dependent on God and he knew help would come. And help did come in unexpected ways. In Boston he met a wealthy woman who introduced him to Prof. John Henry Wright of Harvard University. Deeply impressed by the extraordinary intelligence and erudition of Swamiji, Prof. Wright immediately gave him letters of introduction to the different committees of the Parliament of Religions.

Equipped with these letters, Swami Vivekananda returned to Chicago by train on the day previous to the opening of the Parliament, but found that he had lost the address of the Chairman of the Parliament Committee. After wandering in the streets for some time, he was accosted by a highly cultured and wealthy woman named Mrs. George W. Hale. Coming to know of his plight she took him to her home. After he had a wash and breakfast, she conducted him to the offices of the Parliament and got him admitted as a delegate on the strength of Prof. Wright's letters.

The Chicago World's Parliament of Religions

The holding of the Parliament of Religions, as part of the Columbian Exposition, was one of the great events in the history of the world, an important milestone in the history of inter-religious relationship. It also marked a new era in the millennial history of Hinduism. Its full significance will be unveiled only with the lapse of time. Delegates representing diverse forms of organized religious belief came from different parts of the world. It helped to unify the religious vision of humanity, to broaden the outlook of religions, and to initiate an era of dialogue among different religions, which had largely functioned till then in isolation or at cross-purposes. And it did something more; it made the West conscious of the rich spiritual heritage of the East, particularly of India. In the words of the Hon. Merlin Marie Snell, President of the Scientific Section of the Parliament:

> One of its chief advantages has been in the great lesson which it has taught the Christian World, especially to the people of the United States, namely, that there are other religions more venerable than Christianity which surpass it in philosophical depth, in spiritual intensity, in independent vigour of thought, and in breadth and sincerity of human sympathy, while not yielding to it a single hair's breadth in ethical beauty and efficiency. Eight great non-Christian religious groups were represented in its deliberations — Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Mohammedanism, and Mazdaism.[15]

The Parliament was a great concourse of some of the most distinguished personages of the world; a great mass of humanity, varying from seven to ten thousand in number, attended its sessions; it included many of the great philosophers of the world. More than one thousand papers were read by the different delegates. There were several sections, including a Scientific Section.

Vivekananda at the Parliament

On the opening day, the Chairman had called Swami Vivekananda several times to speak, but each time he had said, 'No, not now', until the Chairman was puzzled and wondered if he would speak at all. At length in the late afternoon, when the Chairman insisted, the Swami rose and surveyed in a sweep the large assembly before him. The whole audience grew intent; there was pin-drop silence. Bowing to Devi Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, he addressed his audience as 'Sisters and Brothers of America'. Before he could utter another word, the whole Parliament was caught up in a great wave of enthusiasm, and hundreds rose to their feet with shouts of applause. There was cheering, cheering, cheering for full two minutes! The Swami was bewildered.

When silence was restored, the Swami continued his speech, replying to the words of welcome, by thanking the youngest of nations, namely, America, in the name of the most ancient Order of monks in the world, namely, the Vedic Order of sannyāsins. He introduced Hinduism as the 'Mother of Religions', which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. He illustrated this by referring to the welcome and protection accorded by

Hindus to the Jewish refugees in the first century AD and the Zoroastrian refugees in the eighth century AD and he ended by quoting two illustrative passages from the Hindu scriptures: 'As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they may appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee!' 'Whosoever comes to Me through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me!'

It was a brief but intense speech. Its spirit of universality, earnestness, and breadth of outlook completely captivated the whole assembly. He cast off the formalism of the Parliament and spoke to the people in the language of the heart. The phrase of five words which he initially uttered: *Sisters and Brothers of America*, was a tongue of flame which set aflame the hearts of his listeners. Each orator had spoken of *his* God, of the God of *his sect*. He alone spoke on behalf of all their Gods, and embraced them all in the Universal Being. It was the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna breaking down the barriers between religions through the voice of his great disciple.

During the ensuing sessions he spoke on *Why We Disagree* on 15 September, when he denounced the insularity of religions and narrated the illustrative parable of the 'Frog in the well'; read his celebrated *Paper on Hinduism* on 19 September, followed by a talk on *Religion not the Crying Need of India* on 20 September, when he exhorted the Christian nations not to waste their resources on saving the *souls* of the heathens but to concentrate on saving their *hungry bodies*; on *Orthodox Hinduism and the Vedanta Philosophy* and *The Modern Religions of India* on 22 September; on *The Essence of the Hindu Religion* on 25 September; on *Buddhism: The Fulfilment of Hinduism* on 26 September; and gave his *Address at the Final Session* on 27 September. Beside these, he addressed the Scientific Section and also gave other lectures.

In his *Address at the Final Session*, the Swami rose to luminous heights and, highlighting the achievements of the Parliament, uttered these prophetic words of hope:

> If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world and that every system has

produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that, upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not Fight', 'Assimilation and not destruction', 'Harmony and Peace and not Dissension'.[16]

'His words are great music', said Romain Rolland about Vivekananda's utterances. Vivekananda set to music the song which was haunting the hearts of millions in the modern world — the song of unity and harmony, of love and peace, the tune of the divine in the heart of man.

Vivekananda's Work in the West

Swami Vivekananda went to the West not merely to attend the Parliament of Religions. Even before he left India he had the firm conviction that the Parliament would be nothing more than a gateway to a large work awaiting him in the West. After the Parliament Swamiji remained in America for nearly three years, which included two visits to England. His main fields of work were Chicago, Boston, Detroit, and New York. Especially during the first year he travelled incessantly, giving lectures and parlour talks.

Swamiji's main effort was to spread the message of Vedanta that man's essential nature is divine and the goal of life is to realize this inherent divinity and manifest it in every field of human activity. In order to clear the path for the acceptance of this lofty message Swamiji had to strive to free the minds of people from ignorance and prejudice and misconceptions about India's ancient culture. In this latter task, he had to face virulent opposition from bigoted members of the established churches. But through his purity of character, sincerity of purpose, and the power of spiritual realizations, he triumphed over all opposition and won the love and allegiance of a number of liberal-minded and enlightened people.

Sincere spiritual seekers soon began to gather around him and he started conducting regular classes for them in New York. His lectures and class talks were published in the form of books. *Rāja-Yoga*, *Bhakti-Yoga*, and *Karma-Yoga* were the first to appear. *Jñāna-Yoga*, containing mostly his

lectures delivered in London, appeared later. These books inaugurated a new approach to religion, and millions of people have learned the essentials of spiritual life from them.

Vivekananda first visited London in late 1895. It was during this visit that he met Margaret Noble who later become Sister Nivedita. Swamiji's second visit to London took place in April 1896. During this visit Captain and Mrs. Sevier met him and become his very devoted disciples.

In the midst of his incessant work Swamiji never forgot his motherland. His whole mind was set on the task of rejuvenating India by infusing a new vitality into the veins of the nation. The main obstacle to this task was the utter poverty and backwardness of the poor masses. Unless these people were raised, there was no hope of India's becoming a great nation. Swamiji wrote inspiring letters to his monastic brothers in Calcutta, to kings and their ministers, to his disciples in Madras and other places, and exhorted them to dedicate their lives to the service of the poor. Following his suggestions the disciples in Madras started two journals in English. Another journal in Bengali was started in Calcutta.

However, Swamiji knew that, although he had many followers and admirers in different parts of India, without a strong organization it would not be possible to do any significant work. He also knew that he would have to go back to India to awaken the minds of people and organize them. If in 1893 Swamiji felt the call of the West, four years later, he felt that his motherland was calling him. Finally, after a short tour of Europe, he set sail from Naples on 30 December 1896, accompanied by the two Seviers and J. J. Goodwin who served as his stenographer.

Vivekananda Awakens the Soul of India

Even when he was in America, Swamiji had some foreknowledge of the stupendous response of the Indian people that was waiting for him on his return to his motherland. To some of his disciples in Detroit he had remarked: 'But India shall listen to me. I will shake India to her foundations....'

Vivekananda landed in Colombo on 15 January 1897 and from there travelled to Rameswaram. At each place he received a rousing welcome — a welcome, the type of which, in intensity, spontaneity, loftiness, and pervasive-

ness, no military conquerors or other heroes in history have received. And, in response to that tumultuous national welcome, he gave to his people his stirring Vedantic message to awaken them from their centuries-long sleep and build up their country on humanist lines. In the East or West, he was always the awakener of souls. The central theme of his inspiring Indian speeches was man — his growth, development, and fulfilment.

Vivekananda's lectures from Colombo in Sri Lanka in the far south, to Almora in the Himalayas in the far north, created a great national awakening; for his main theme was the awakening of the Indian mind and strengthening it to meet modern challenges, and to utilize the vast opportunities of the modern age to evolve a truly humanistic social order. We catch this theme in the very opening sentence of his first speech on Indian soil, in Ramnad, near the ancient sacred pilgrim town of Rameswaram in the far south. This was delivered just fifty years before India achieved her political independence in 1947:

> The longest night seems to be passing away, the sorest trouble seems to be coming to an end at last, the seeming corpse appears to be awakening, and a voice is coming to us — away back where history and even tradition fails to peep into the gloom of the past, coming down from there, reflected, as it were, from peak to peak of the infinite Himalaya of knowledge, and of love, and of work, India, this motherland of ours — a voice is coming unto us, gentle, firm, and yet unmistakable in its utterance, and is gaining volume as days pass by, and behold, the sleeper is awakening! Like a breeze from the Himalayas, it is bringing life into the almost dead bones and muscles, the lethargy is passing away, and only the blind cannot see, or the perverted will not see, that she is awakening, this motherland of ours, from her deep long sleep.
>
> None can resist her any more; never is she going to sleep any more; no outward powers can hold her back any more; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet![17]

'Imagine the thunderous reverberations of these words', remarks Romain Rolland, and adds: 'From that day, the awakening of the torpid colossus began. If the generation that followed saw, three years after Vivekananda's death, the revolt of Bengal, the prelude to the great movement of Tilak and Gandhi, if India today has definitely taken part in the collective action of organized masses,

it is due to the initial shock, to the mighty "Lazarus, come forth!" of the message from Madras.'[18]

Vivekananda's Work in India

Swamiji's lectures in different parts of India created a wave of spiritual awakening. His main task, however, was to uplift the masses, millions of people sunk in ignorance, helplessness, and destitution. He had seen with his own eyes the pitiable condition of these people during his days of wandering. And now, after his return from the West, he decided to take up the work of uplifting the masses.

Swamiji saw that the only way to uplift the masses was to give them proper education. He said: 'One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by ignorance and nothing else.'[19] The poor were ignorant of their inherent power and capacity to overcome obstacles and attain prosperity. How can the ignorance of the masses be removed? Swamiji believed that education was the only way to solve the problems of the Indian masses.

People need two kinds of education — secular education to better their economic condition, and religious education to create faith in themselves and lead a moral life. Swamiji wanted that people should be helped to stand on their own feet without losing their spirituality. To spread this kind of education on a massive scale, what was most needed was an organization. Without the support of a powerful organization, individual efforts would soon burn out. As Swami Vivekananda put it: 'My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the doorstep of everybody and then let men and women settle their own fate.'[20]

With the idea of starting an organization Swamiji called a meeting of the monastic and lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna on the 1st of May 1897 at the house of Balaram Bose in Calcutta. In the meeting it was decided to form an organization called the Ramakrishna Mission Association in which both monks and lay devotees would work in cooperation for the welfare of the people.

Vivekananda sent his monastic brothers as teachers to different places to spread the message of Vedanta. Saradananda and Abhedananda had already been sent to America. Ramakrishnananda was sent to Madras and Shivananda to Colombo. The next year when plague broke out in Calcutta, Swamiji

organized relief work on a large scale. Akhandananda also conducted relief work among the famine-stricken people in Murshidabad. Another work of far-reaching significance was the starting of a school for girls by Sister Nivedita.

Swamiji's health broke down under the strain of frequent lecturing, talking to an endless stream of visitors, and the heat of the plains. But his mind was set on a work of enduring nature, namely, putting the monastic Order, to which he and his monastic brothers belonged, on a firm foundation. In 1899 the monastery was shifted to a newly-acquired piece of land at Belur near Calcutta and, by executing a deed of trust, Swamiji turned it over to a Board of Trustees. Another monastery for the practice of Advaita Vedanta was founded at Mayavati in the Himalayas.

After putting his Indian work on a firm foundation, Swami Vivekananda went on a second visit to the West. Though the duration of this visit was short (from the middle of 1899 to the end of 1900), he travelled extensively. During this visit he could see the darker side of Western culture and felt all the more that Western culture needed an infusion of Indian spirituality for its survival and progress.

Swamiji spent his remaining days on the earth quietly, training his disciples. The end came all too suddenly in his room at Belur Math. On the night of 4 July 1902, he left his mortal frame to become the immortal Flame of love, knowledge, and power adored by millions of people.

Vedanta and the Spiritual Crisis of the Modern West

Swami Vivekananda was a great admirer of the Western spirit and its achievements. He admired its science, its technology, its industrial efficiency, and its humanism. And he told his Indian followers that India's Western connection with Britain had helped to break India's ossified and stagnant society and civilization, throwing open the possibility of building up a more dynamic and creative society and civilization in its place in the modern age.[21] But he found the Western philosophy of man shallow and harmful, and unfit to lead man to total fulfilment. Modern Western civilization is frankly materialistic and secular. It neither seeks, nor derives, any inspiration from Western religion, which has functioned as its antagonist since the sixteenth century. Its concept of man is that he is merely a biological organism seeking organic satisfactions

and organic survival. Such a philosophy may be a dynamic, progressive force in the short run; but it is fraught with evil in the long run; firstly, because it falls far short of the truth about man as ascertained by a scientific and penetrating study of man in depth such as was undertaken by the Vedanta in India; secondly, because it does not explain, or sustain, ethical phenomena or spiritual experience, which involve a view of man deeper than that of an ego centred in an organic being. Swami Vivekananda foresaw that these severe limitations in its philosophy of man were bound to turn its successes into ashes in its mouth at no distant time. He often warned while he was in the West that the West was sitting on a volcano, and he pointed this out on his return to India. He said:

> The whole of Western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual foundation. It is hopeless and perfectly useless to attempt to govern mankind with the sword. You will find that the very centres from which such ideas as government by force sprang up are the very centres to degrade and degenerate and crumble into dust within fifty years if she is not mindful to change her position, to shift her ground, and make spirituality the basis of her life. And what will save Europe is the religion of the Upaniṣads.[22]

The Upaniṣads speak of man as essentially divine, and Vivekananda defined religion as the manifestation of this divinity already within man. It was this vision of man that he presented with telling effect, first, during his addresses at the Parliament of Religions, when he had called humanity 'Children of Immortal Bliss', and, next, in his subsequent lectures and discourses, including those on the subject of *Rāja-Yoga*.

Since Swami Vivekananda uttered his warning in 1897, the West has experienced two world wars, the second more shattering than the first, with recurring political and economic crises in between. The end of the Second World War found Europe disillusioned and at the end of its tether, but America at the height of its power and glory, with disillusionment two decades away. But the twenty-five years of the post-war history of America has only confirmed Vivekananda's diagnosis of modern Western man's ailments. Modern man's material affluence stands in sharp contrast to his inner poverty and insufficiency. His puny ego is a fugitive entity ever at the mercy of the pulls of his sensate nature and ever a prey to tensions, leading to increasing

ailments, both psychosomatic and psychic. Western thinkers are becoming more and more alive to this problem. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* relates how the late Zurich psychologist Jung characterized man in his book of that title. Modern man is 'alienated' from his own true self, declare other psychologists. In the meantime, the crisis deepens with every passing year, and the younger generation is dazed and bewildered.

While some Western thinkers have achieved a correct diagnosis of the modern ills on the lines seen by Swami Vivekananda, very few have the insight into the problem to be able to prescribe the correct remedy. In fact, it is generally the case that most of the remedies proposed, and even applied, are worse than the disease. That is because the diagnosis and the remedy are based on the same discredited philosophy of man — that he is merely an organic entity seeking organic satisfactions. The deeper spiritual dimensions of man remain increasingly ill-nourished. As a result, mere pursuit of false values of material success and affluence have begun to repel thousands of sensitive young minds, as also some thinkers, in Europe and America today. Vedanta and the spiritual core of all religions have always maintained that worldliness is a spiritual disease and that 'living in the world' is not the same as 'being worldly'. While living in the world, man has to strive to achieve awareness of his true spiritual nature. If this is not done, his life becomes a false life and his living in the world becomes living in worldliness. The so-called 'normal' 'adjusted' life is truly the abnormal and false life. What Vivekananda conveyed as the Vedantic conviction over hundred years ago is being echoed by some Western thinkers themselves today. Says the English psychiatrist R. D. Laing:

> Thus I would wish to emphasize that our 'normal' 'adjusted' state is too often the abdication of ecstasy, the betrayal of our true potentialities, that many of us are only too successful in acquiring a false self to adjust to false realities.[23]

In a letter written in 1894 from America about the best gift that India has to give to the West, Swami Vivekananda says:

> The whole world requires Light. It is expectant! India alone has that Light, not in magic, mummeries, and charlatanism, but in the teaching of the glories of the spirit of real religion — of the highest spiritual truth. That

is why the Lord has preserved the race through all its vicissitude unto the present day. Now the time has come![24]

East and West Need Each Other

The West is responding to the call of the East, especially of India, in a big way today. Vivekananda's message has continued to be spread in the West by the growing Vedanta Movement conducted by his Ramakrishna Order, which carries out its work in the West depending entirely on the people of the West for its finances, and never on India. It is also being spread by several Western personalities and groups, students and writers. Max Müller wrote his *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* during Vivekananda's own lifetime. The number of Western books on Hinduism and Indian culture are legion. And within twenty-six years of Vivekananda's passing away, there appeared the most remarkable Western response to his and his Master's message in Romain Rolland's *Life of Ramakrishna* and *Life of Vivekananda*.

In his *Life of Vivekananda*, Romain Rolland summons the West to grasp the hand of friendship extended by India through Vivekananda and others:

> And that is where we find the hand of our allies, the thinkers of India, stretched out to meet us; for they have known for centuries past how to entrench themselves in this Feste Burg (a stronghold sure) and how to defend it while we, their brethren of the Great Invasions, have spent our strength in conquering the rest of the world. Let us stop and recover our breath! Let us return to our eagle's nest in the Himalayas....
>
> Among the spiritual ruins strewn all over Europe, our 'Mother India' will teach you to excavate the unshakable foundations of your Capitols. She possesses the calculations and plans of the 'Master Craftsman'. Let us rebuild our house with our own materials.[25]

And Rolland concludes his *Life of Vivekananda* with an invitation to the West (which is what he means when he addresses the Europeans, since he was writing in French) to respond to the message of the East through Vivekananda, the great emissary of modern India. It is the message of the spiritual awakening of modern humanity, for which Vivekananda has sounded his clarion call: 'Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached':

> The work begun by the two Indian Masters will be carried on resolutely by other workmen of the spirit in other parts of the world. In whatever tunnel a man be digging, he is never out of sound of the sap being dug on the other side of the mountain....
>
> My European companions, I have made you listen through the wall, to the blows of the coming one, Asia.... Go to meet her! She is working for us. We are working for her. Europe and Asia are the two halves of the Soul....[26]

Conclusion

Out of the nine years of Vivekananda's public ministry, from the Parliament of Religions in 1893 up to his death in 1902, he gave his five most intense years to the West. The intensity of his nine years of work in the West and in India, the output of spiritual, intellectual, literary, and organizational work, besides the travelling involved during the period, is unprecedented. As a teacher of modern India and as her cultural and spiritual emissary to the West, Vivekananda has illuminated the horizon of national and international life, and this has no parallel in world history. He was a man with a message and he delivered it fearlessly and intensely. He had said of himself: 'Buddha had a message to the East; and I have a message to the West.' The West will one day learn to feel proud of this emissary of modern India and learn from him the philosophy of a comprehensive spirituality and of total life-fulfilment and the way to its own redemption from a soul-killing materialism. When that response comes from the West, the tunnel connecting East and West would be complete, and a new culture, neither Eastern nor Western, but just human, would be evolved, making for the spiritual growth of man everywhere and tending to develop a 'mankind-awareness' in all nations; and that will mark the fulfilment of the purposes of the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the modern age.

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Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Turiyananda, and Saradananda

BREAKING NEW GROUND*

SWAMI PURNATMANANDA

The Genesis

IT ALL BEGAN with a profound utterance. Some time in 1884, Sri Ramakrishna, perfectly hale and hearty, was seated in his room at Dakshineswar and talking to the devotees assembled there, among whom was also young Narendranath — Swami Vivekananda of later years. Sri Ramakrishna, while discussing various spiritual topics, spoke about the tenets of the Vaishnava religion. The Vaishnava doctrine teaches that one should always be careful to observe three things, viz. taste for God's name [*nāme ruci*], kindness to jīvas [*jīve dayā*], and worship of Vaishnavas [*vaiṣṇava-pūjan*]. Then he went on elaborating the three principles one by one. As soon as he uttered the words 'kindness to jivas', he suddenly went into ecstasy. After some time he came back to semi-normal consciousness and began to mutter: '"Kindness to jīvas"

*The period covered in this article is the first fifteen years from the inception of the Ramakrishna Mission, i.e. from 1897 to 1912. This is, in other words, the first five years of the Mission till the passing away of Swami Vivekananda in 1902 and the first decade of Swami Brahmananda's presidency after Swamiji's passing away. This is, in fact, how Swami Gambhirananda in his *History of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission* has arranged two chapters entitled 'On the March' (1897-1902) and 'In the Leader's Footsteps' (1902-1912).

— "kindness to jīvas"? Never! Insignificant creature that you are, how dare you show kindness to jīvas? Who are you to bestow kindness? No, no; not kindness to jīvas, but service to jīvas as Shiva.'

Everyone listened to those words of Sri Ramakrishna, but none could comprehend their deep import. It was Narendranath alone who caught the significance and, on coming out of the room after Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy was over, said:

> Ah! What a wonderful light have I got today from the Master's words! What a new and attractive Gospel have we received today through those words of his, wherein a synthesis has been effected of sweet devotion to the Lord with Vedantic knowledge, which is generally regarded as dry, austere and lacking sympathy with the sufferings of others.... From what the Master in ecstasy said today, it is gathered that the Vedanta of the forest can be brought to human habitation, and that it can be applied in practice to the work-a-day world.... If the divine Lord ever grants me an opportunity, I will proclaim everywhere in the world this wonderful truth I have heard today. I will preach this truth to the learned and to the ignorant, to the rich and the poor, to the Brāhmaṇa and the Chaṇḍāla.[1]

Therefore, the birth of the Ramakrishna Mission, in the spiritual and ideological sense, took place at Dakshineswar and it dates back to some day in 1884. Its genesis was involved in that profound utterance of Sri Ramakrishna, and it was left to the wonderful genius of Swami Vivekananda, then Narendranath, to discover immediately the tremendous significance embedded in it and to give it a concrete form later in the shape of a unique monastic organization known as the 'Ramakrishna Mission'.

Special Features

The Ramakrishna Mission is unique in the history of monastic organizations in India for the remarkable synthesis it strikes between concept and practice. It is unique because of its tremendous message of 'the divinity of man', its wonderful gospel of 'the social commitment of monasticism', its deep concern for the masses, especially women, for the afflicted, for the poor, for the downtrodden — for humanity in general.

It is unique because unlike other ancient monastic organizations in India and abroad it looks upon women with supreme veneration and works for their uplift from the tragic predicament they have been placed in by the male-dominated society over the centuries. Its uniqueness lies in its sustained and systematic efforts to build schools for girls and hospitals for pregnant mothers, and, last but not least, in founding an organization exclusively for nuns without any interference by monks. No other monastic organization in the world — Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, or Christian — has taken such a bold step.

It is unique because of its magnificent equation of 'work and worship' and its elimination of the distinction between the 'sacred and the secular', to quote the beautiful expression of Sister Nivedita. The idea of service, no doubt, was long in practice in the Christian monastic organizations. However, it cannot be denied that it had been directly or indirectly associated with the work of proselytization. The Ramakrishna Mission abhors the idea of conversion. It advocates the principle of unity of religions and harmony of faiths. It not only believes in tolerance, but in positive acceptance also. It believes in the freedom of an individual to choose his or her own religion and, therefore, considers the act of conversion a crime and exploitation when forced upon someone, taking undue advantage of his or her poverty and illiteracy. It is unique because of its bold and consistent stand against all sorts of communalism, fundamentalism, and sectarianism. It is unique because of its firm and unequivocal stand that it maintains no connection with politics in any form. During the last one hundred years of its glorious existence it never deviated from this position.

The Ramakrishna Mission is unique because it decries mystery-mongering and so-called supernaturalism. It exhorts people to act according to reason and never to get swayed by sheer sentimentalism or any dose of morbidity in the guise of devotion. Thus the Mission is the antithesis of religiosity.

In this way, the Mission attempts to project the concept and practice of a scientific and universal religion devoid of all religious superstitions and parochialism, and aspires to bridge the so-called gap between religion and science. In fact, the central ideals of the Ramakrishna Mission are devotion and rationality on the one hand and harmony and universality on the other.

Swami Vivekananda, the Leader (1863-1902)

Historically speaking, the Ramakrishna Mission was founded on 1 May 1897. But the formal foundation was only the inevitable sequel to the grand utterance of Sri Ramakrishna that Swami Vivekananda himself heard at Dakshineswar, which has been already mentioned, and to the great legacy of the illustrious life and vibrant message of Sri Ramakrishna, which he bequeathed to his chief disciple initially at Dakshineswar and later at Shyampukur and Cossipore during his final years in this world. However, when Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission on 1 May 1897, uniting social commitment to the spiritual culture of mankind, many eyebrows were raised. This 'many' included not only outsiders and the conservative elite of society, but also some of his own brother disciples. They mistakenly thought that Swami Vivekananda was deviating from the established norms, patterns, and concepts of traditional monasticism. The dissident brother disciples found in his actions a marked straying from the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and an evident influence of Western culture. However, Swami Vivekananda was indomitable, being fully convinced that he was only attempting to translate the new and bold gospel of his Master into a concrete form, which was in absolute conformity with Indian tradition and the message of Vedanta. He was not, however, alone in this conviction. There were several of his brother disciples who shared his conviction and supported him without the slightest doubt and misgiving. Above all, there was the Holy Mother — Sri Sarada Devi, wife of Sri Ramakrishna. Time and again she expressed in the most categorical terms that Swami Vivekananda was truly an instrument in the hands of the Master and that his words and actions were never his, but were all Sri Ramakrishna's and only Sri Ramakrishna's. Unfortunately, those who did not agree with him then could not decipher the writing of Providence on the wall of time. People had frowned at Buddha and Christ also, but time proved that Buddha and Christ were right. The 108 years of the Ramakrishna Mission, though a tiny period of time compared to many hundreds of years associated with Buddha and Christ, speak volumes in testimony of the fact that Vivekananda was also right. In fact, few then could know that before them stood a new Buddha, a new Christ! Eventually the society appreciated what Swami Vivekananda had done, and all his dissident brother disciples also, both monastic and lay, realized

that he was only fulfilling the wishes and dictates of the Master. Today historians, philosophers, and social scientists admit that by founding the Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda not only extended the limits of monasticism and religion, but also opened up in them a new dimension. He gave a new consciousness to monasticism and religion — infused new life into both, as it were. He established monasticism on its true ideal and added to it a new dimension, new significance, new import, new expansion, new depth, and new mobility. Ascetic monasticism turned poetic and humane.

Throughout its long tradition, Hindu monasticism had proved itself to be utterly callous to society and to the people at large. The tradition of Hindu monasticism never admitted any commitment either to society or to the people. God-realization or Self-liberation was its only ideal and God was the centre of its spiritual endeavours and aspirations. The sannyāsi used to shut himself up in a secluded cave of a mountain or a cottage in a forest and spend his days and nights in the contemplation of God or the Self. Society and people provided him with food, clothing, and sustenance. But he never cared to feel any concern for them; rather he remained content with his majestic aloofness from society and people. Swami Vivekananda said:

> For the good of the many, for the happiness of the many is the Sannyāsin born. His life is all vain, indeed, who embracing Sannyāsa, forgets this ideal. The Sannyāsin, verily, is born into this world to lay down his life for others, to stop the bitter cries of men, to wipe the tears of the widow, to bring peace to the soul of the bereaved mother, to equip the ignorant masses for the struggle for existence, to accomplish the secular and spiritual well-being of all through the diffusion of spiritual teachings and to arouse the sleeping lion of Brahman in all by throwing in the light of knowledge.[2]

Vivekananda placed before the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission a twofold motto: *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca* — for one's own salvation and for the good of the world. This motto, a novel motto indeed, became the war-song of his new movement. What he did thereby was unique in the history of monasticism — building a bridge between ancient and modern ideals. He kept intact the age-old ideal of monasticism, viz. the ideal of self-liberation, but added to it at the same time the ideal of humanism, the ideal of doing public good. He never shifted the position of God from the centre

of the monk's spiritual endeavours and aspirations. He only gave a new name for Him — 'Man'. He equated Man with God and thus God exchanged His position with Man as the object of worship. The 'mission' of the Ramakrishna Mission as set by Swami Vivekananda was, in his own words, 'evolving a God out of the material man'. The 'mission' was nothing but the 'mission' of Vedanta. Hence Swami Vivekananda termed his new mission 'Practical Vedanta'. Swami Brahmananda described the advent of Sri Ramakrishna as signifying the building of 'a bridge' between the plane of the 'jiva' and that of 'Shiva'. This, he declared, was a new contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to the world.[3] From this evolves another aspect of practical Vedanta — the philosophy of work, which advocates the equation of work with worship. The Ramakrishna Mission as well as the Ramakrishna Math are instruments through which these lofty goals are being realized in the lives of many fortunate souls.

The Great Architects

Sri Ramakrishna thus gave the inspiration, Swami Vivekananda offered the interpretation, and Swamis Brahmananda, Premananda, Turiyananda, Saradananda and the other brother disciples, under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda, put the inspiration and interpretation in action. The Master did not live to see his inspiration interpreted and get crystalized in the shape of an organization. The leader interpreted the Master's concept through the length and breadth of India and abroad. He also started a 'machine' known as the 'Ramakrishna Mission' to put the Master's concept into practice and set it nicely in motion. But he too like the Master did not live to see the new organization grow stronger and become fully consolidated. He left his body five years after the birth of the Ramakrishna Mission, perhaps to give effect to the adage — 'A great man knows when to die and how to die'. Before he died, he saw his brother disciples working hard under the leadership of Swami Brahmananda to break new ground for the new movement and put it on a stable foundation. Sister Nivedita had the privilege to witness closely for over nine years the advance of the movement after the passing away of Swami Vivekananda. She saw how masterly the work of the Mission was being carried on by his brother disciples under Swami Brahmananda. In reference to the

contribution of the brother disciples of Swami Vivekananda to the birth and growth of the Ramakrishna Order, she wrote:

> ...Meaningless...would have been the Order of Ramakrishna without Vivekananda, even so futile would have been the life and labours of Vivekananda, without behind him, his brothers of the Order of Ramakrishna.[4]

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922)

When the Ramakrishna Mission was founded on 1 May 1897, the monastery, in its second phase, was located in a rented house at Alambazar. The Mission at its very inception had Swami Vivekananda as its General President and Swami Brahmananda as the President of the Calcutta centre. This was natural, because Vivekananda was the leader of the Order. But Vivekananda selected Swami Brahmananda as his principal assistant to monitor and direct the whole movement. Although both were of the same age, Swami Vivekananda looked upon Swami Brahmananda as his 'friend, philosopher, and guide'. Swamiji was an extraordinary visionary and a prophet with the genius of a wonderful planner. He said, 'My work must be quick as lightning and strong as the thunderbolt.'[5] But he knew that he had very little time to implement his visions and plans. That's why he became very restless and impatient. There was none among the brother disciples except Swami Brahmananda who could cope with his tumultuous impulses and impatience. Swami Vijnanananda, another brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda who happened to be a district civil engineer before he embraced monasticism, was an eyewitness to such outbursts of Swamiji on Swami Brahmananda. He narrated later how terrible and severe those outbursts had been. But Swami Brahmananda remained absolutely calm and unperturbed on such occasions. This state of poise and graceful balance was his very nature, but at the same time it must also be remembered that such harshness in no way reflected the slightest change in Swami Vivekananda's tremendous faith and confidence in and profound love for Swami Brahmananda. Swamiji loved all his brother disciples 'more than anybody else on earth' as he himself said, and for Swami Brahmananda he had an extra-special love and fondness. Swami Ashokananda, who had the rare privilege of hearing firsthand from some direct

disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and many senior monks about the early days of the Order, writes:

> In those years when Ramakrishna Math and [Ramakrishna] Mission were being founded, Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] bore unimaginable hardships for the sake of the work. He gave himself wholly to carrying out the Master's mission as Swami Vivekananda interpreted it and was soon engaged in all kinds of projects.[6]

First and foremost, it was essential for the headquarters of the Math and Mission to be located on a permanent plot of land. At that time the monastery was housed in the rented garden house of Nilambar Mukherjee at Belur and it was in its third phase of shifting to rented houses. Swami Ashokananda narrates in brief the role of Swami Brahmananda in preparing the newly acquired land at Belur on the Ganga. He writes:

> There was little sleep; sometimes work began in the middle of the night. ...Brick steps had to be built from the bottom of the river. The labourers could work only when the tide was out, and the Swami [Swami Brahmananda] and the engineer [Swami Vijnanananda] had to be ready to direct them.

Before the work of the embankment was undertaken in March 1902, there had been other vital works also, viz. clearing and levelling the uneven ground, planning and constructing new buildings including the shrine, and renovating the existing quarters, and maintaining an absolutely perfect record of accounts. Swami Ashokananda adds:

> One of his most uncongenial duties was conducting a lawsuit that the Math brought against the municipality of Belur. As a religious institution the local municipality regarded the property as a garden-house, not a monastery, and therefore taxable. The suit, which was finally settled in favour of the Math, dragged on for over a year and contested up to the Calcutta High Court. ... A spiritual giant of the stature of Swami Brahmananda was not, according to any tradition, the person to engage in this kind of labour — supervising construction, conducting a lawsuit, keeping accounts, and so on. But he stood by Swamiji in every respect.[7]

Why did Swami Brahmananda do that? It was because of his immense love for their beloved leader and his extraordinary genius to appreciate the relevance and efficacy of Swamiji's 'revolutionary' ideas and ideals, which were destined to usher in a total transformation in monasticism leading to enormous benefits for both monasticism and society. That is why he never hesitated to surrender his own likes and dislikes, his personal aversions and preferences to those of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Ashokananda writes:

> As long as Swamiji lived he [Swami Brahmananda] would do nothing without his approval. He did not argue with him, he did not oppose him, he did not object to the methods or his ideals; on the contrary, he made himself completely one with them. Not for a single moment did he differ from Swamiji, and Swamiji knew that even if all the others were to forsake him, Swami Brahmananda would stand by him with the utmost faith and loyalty — and on that faith and loyalty of his, stability of the Ramakrishna Order was based.[8]

Swami Vivekananda had wonderful foresight and he knew that Swami Brahmananda would soon shoulder the entire responsibility of the organization, and that was why the former trained him in every possible way to equip him to be his worthy successor. Swamiji had taken the hint for his plan from an utterance of their Master, who said that 'Rakhal [Swami Brahmananda's pre-monastic name] has the intelligence of a king; he could rule a kingdom.' To give effect to his own plan Swamiji resigned from the Presidentship of the organization, and on 12 February 1901, Swami Brahmananda was elected President, the office which he held till his passing away on 10 April 1922. During this period of over two decades it was Swami Brahmananda who actually 'symbolized the organisation'. Turning again to the event of Swami Brahmananda's election as the President, we may add that this gave the greatest relief to Swamiji before he left the world. Overjoyed and fully relaxed, he used to say earlier when he saw Swami Brahmananda's great ability in streamlining the activities of the Math:

> I have been stunned to see Raja's [Swami Brahmananda was fondly called by Swamiji 'Raja' — king] work. How nicely he is running the Math! About him Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'He can rule a kingdom'.[9]

A few months before his passing away Swamiji expressed in a letter (dated 12 February 1902) to Sister Nivedita his absolute faith in and dependence on Swami Brahmananda:

> I recommend you none — not one — except Brahmananda. That *old man's* [Sri Ramakrishna's] judgements never failed — mine always do. If you have to ask my advice or get anybody to do your business, Brahmananda is the only one I recommend, none else; with this my conscience is clear.[10]

Swami Vivekananda entered into mahāsamādhi on 4 July 1902. By then the organization had been put into a regular 'shape and substance' and it had earned world-wide recognition and appreciation. But the passing away of Swamiji was a Himalayan blow to Swami Brahmananda in particular and to the other brothers in general. It was a heart-breaking shock to all the monastics, devotees, and admirers of the organization. For the organization it was indeed a crucial period of great trial and storm. But this also let everyone see how perfect was Swamiji's selection of Swami Brahmananda as the next leader of the movement and the organization. Swami Ashokananda writes:

> Swami Brahmananda gave himself at once to the work that Swami Vivekananda left him and assumed the responsibility of leader. In his short lifetime, Swamiji had started a number of centres and... initiated various kinds of work. Swami Brahmananda now took on the task of evolving, stabilizing, and expanding these centres and activities in accord with Swami Vivekananda's plans. His grave, deeply spiritual personality assumed its natural proportions, and the Master's words about his 'royal intelligence' were now indeed to be proved true.[11]

As the years rolled on, his presidency witnessed not only a sound and steady maintenance of the status that the organization reached during Swamiji's lifetime, but also further remarkable expansion and positive growth in every sphere.

Shortly after starting the Ramakrishna Mission, Swamiji started *Udbodhan*, the Bengali journal of the Order, with Swami Trigunatitananda as its editor. This he did to propagate the spiritual message of their Master and the new spirit of work and service to the reading public of Bengal. There were already two English journals, *Brahmavadin* and *Prabuddha Bharata*, with a

similar purpose for the national and international readership. Initially these two English journals were being published by devotees, but soon *Prabuddha Bharata* became an organ of the Order. By the time Swamiji passed away, the organization had in its fold under its Headquarters at Belur a number of centres in India [Madras, Mayavati, Sargachi, Varanasi (Advaita Ashrama), Allahabad, Kankhal, and Dhaka] as well as three centres in the United States of America [in New York, San Francisco, and San Antonio Valley]. Besides these there were Sister Nivedita's 'Ramakrishna School for Girls' in North Calcutta (started in November 1898) and the relief programmes undertaken now and then by the monastics in different parts of the country. In all these activities Swami Brahmananda had a very prominent role to play in terms of advice and positive support to Swamiji.

From 5 July 1902 till the end of his life Swami Brahmananda not only led the Order from strength to strength, but also trained and guided the monastics to accomplish to the best of their ability the twin ideals set by Swami Vivekananda — *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca* (for one's own salvation and also for the good of the world). He indeed stood before the organization as a bridge between God and the world at large. After Swamiji's passing away Swami Brahmananda kept himself busy for a full year with the work of the organization and tried with his inspiring and overwhelming spiritual presence and gentle leadership to reassure the brother disciples, the monastics, and devotees to overcome their sense of loss of Swamiji. In July 1903 he went on a visit to the centres in North India and, needless to add, Varanasi received his 'first attention'. The object of his visit was to see with his own eyes the overall condition of the centres, to organize their activities more effectively, and also to strengthen their bond of unity with the Headquarters and their allegiance to the true ideals of spirituality. His visits to the Varanasi Advaita Ashrama and Kankhal Sevashrama proved highly rewarding for the monastics and devotees personally and for the centres organizationally. Varanasi Advaita Ashrama had been started by Swami Shivananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, at the instance of Swamiji. It was started in a rented house as a spiritual retreat for the monastics of the Order. Coincidentally it was inaugurated on 4 July 1902, the day Swamiji entered into mahāsamādhi. Swami Brahmananda collected some funds to support the Advaita Ashrama and put it on 'a firmer foundation', as it was undergoing grave financial difficulties. His visit to Varanasi was remarkable

for one important event. He granted affiliation to a centre of service started in Varanasi by a few young men in June 1900 under the inspiration of Swamiji's ideal of work and service. Swamiji himself met them during his visit to Varanasi in February 1902. He was highly pleased with their service programmes. Their institution was then known as 'Poor Men's Relief Association'. Swamiji did not like the name because it did not fit in with the spirit he preached. He suggested that 'Home of Service' (Sevashrama) would be the ideal name. The Association was accordingly renamed 'Ramakrishna Home of Service'. After affiliation it became 'Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service' or 'Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama'. Swami Brahmananda not only accorded official affiliation of the Ramakrishna Mission to this institution, then located in a rented house, but also arranged to collect some funds to purchase a permanent plot of land for it adjacent to the Advaita Ashrama. This was the first centre added to the Ramakrishna Mission after the passing away of Swamiji. Swami Brahmánanda's plan of putting both the centres on their own land and in their own buildings took, however, a few years more to materialize. The land for Advaita Ashrama and the Sevashrama was purchased on 31 July 1906. Swami Brahmananda laid the foundation stone of the Sevashrama on 16 April 1908, and the Sevashrama shifted to its new building on 16 May 1910.

After a stay of about a month in Varanasi, Swami Brahmananda went to the Kankhal Sevashrama and stayed there also for a month. At the behest of Swamiji, the Kankhal Sevashrama had been started in June 1901 in two rented rooms by Swami Kalyanananda, a disciple of Swamiji, to serve the ailing monks of various sects at Hardwar and nearby areas. In 1903 Swami Nischayananda, another disciple of Swamiji, joined him as his assistant. When Swami Brahmananda visited the Kankhal Sevashrama, both the Swamis were so overwhelmed with grief at the loss of Swamiji that they had decided to forsake the work of service and plunge deep into spiritual practice in the solitary caves of the Himalayas. But the holy company of Swami Brahmananda silently changed their mind and they resolved again to dedicate themselves to the *sādhanā* of *sevā*. The Sevashrama at Kankhal was then conducting a free primary school for the poor children of the locality and a branch dispensary at Rishikesh, besides its principal programme of service for the ailing monastics through indoor and outdoor departments at Kankhal. But it was suffering great financial difficulties and was in urgent need of its own land and building.

Swami Brahmananda meanwhile collected a sum of Rs.1,500, and with that fund five acres of land with a well on it were purchased in February 1903. But the possession of the land could not be taken immediately, as there was some dispute with the owner, which was finally settled when Swami Brahmananda acted as mediator. The first building of the Sevashrama on this land was completed in 1905 with funds collected by Swami Brahmananda from two devotees from Calcutta.

After Kankhal, Swami Brahmananda visited Vrindavan and Allahabad en route to Belur Math via Vindhyachal, a sacred place of pilgrimage. In Vrindavan he joined Swami Turiyananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who was spending his days there in spiritual austerities. The visit of Swami Brahmananda to Vrindavan bore fruit a few years later. A Sevashrama was started there under a private body composed of local gentlemen in January 1907, which finally received the affiliation of the Mission on 12 January 1908 under the patronage of Swami Brahmananda. In Allahabad Swami Brahmananda spent some days with Swami Vijnanananda who had been staying there in the Brahmavadin Club since 1900 and who afterwards started in Allahabad a Math centre in 1908 and a Mission centre in 1910. In starting these two centres Swami Vijnanananda obviously drew his inspiration from Swami Vivekananda and derived positive support and received the sincere blessings of the President of the Order, Swami Brahmananda. Swami Brahmananda came back to Belur Math in December 1903.

The visit of Swami Brahmananda to the centres and other holy cities in North India was not just an ordinary visit of the Head of the organization. It was as much a tour of inspection as it was a visit of spiritual guidance, motivation, and rejuvenation to the monastics working in those centres as well as of silent propagation of the new ideals of monasticism left by Swami Vivekananda. Varanasi, Hardwar, Kankhal, Vrindavan, and Allahabad constitute the nerve-centres of traditional monasticism in India. The traditional monastics in those areas looked upon the work of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order — the physical service offered to patients — as the job of *bhangis* or scavengers and in no way fitted to the profession of monastics. So the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission were known in the northern part of India as the '*bhangi sadhus*' or 'the untouchable monks'. Swami Brahmananda's towering spiritual personality was so overwhelming that the monastics of various traditional

sects started to think over the matter afresh and gradually looked upon the work of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order with great respect and esteem. Swami Brahmananda did not address any gathering, but his silent presence was enough and more to vindicate the efficacy of the *Nava-Yugadharma* — the new religion of the modern age — enunciated by Sri Ramakrishna and propagated by Swami Vivekananda. This role of Swami Brahmananda was, however, more evident during his later visits to Varanasi and Kankhal in 1912 and his stay for six months in Varanasi and for seven months in Kankhal. During his stay in Varanasi in November 1912 he got the fullest support of the Holy Mother, who was also staying there then, to reaffirm the ideal of the Mission to the monastics and devotees of the Order, including M, the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, that service to man was indeed worship of God. M held that the service-ideal of Swami Vivekananda was not quite in conformity with the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Referring to the satisfaction of the Holy Mother after her inspection of the work of the monastics at the Varanasi Sevashrama and her remark, 'It is all Sri Ramakrishna's work', some devotees and monks, advised by Swami Brahmananda, wanted M, who was then living in Varanasi, to comment. M replied: 'Now it cannot be denied any more.'[12] This event had a tremendous impact on the whole history of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in regard to the contradiction between the 'sacred' and the 'secular' aspects of monasticism, as it was settled once and for all.

Between the years 1904 and 1912, Swami Brahmananda's visits to Puri (several times) in East India, and Madras and Bangalore in South India, were very important so far as the consolidation and expansion of the work of the organization and the spread of the message of the movement in those parts of India were concerned. Through the untiring efforts of Swami Ramakrishnananda, the head of the Madras centre, Bangalore had the privilege of having a centre with a permanent home on Bull Temple Road, and it was opened by Swami Brahmananda on 20 January 1909.

After the passing away of Swamiji, Swami Brahmananda had to face a very unpleasant and painful job, for which he had to earn the displeasure of many. But as the President of the organization and as the successor of Swami Vivekananda he did what was right and just from the standpoint of the rule as well as the ideal of the Order set by Swami Vivekananda. This was the case of

Sister Nivedita, who got actively involved in politics — the contemporary movement for India's freedom. Swami Brahmananda advised her to give up her connection with politics. But she was so deeply involved in the Swadeshi Movement that she could not accept his advice, and after consultation with him she officially declared her dissociation from the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in July 1902. This dissociation, however, proved before long to be just a formal affair and could not leave any shadow over the most intimate mutual relation between her and the Ramakrishna Order in any respect. It was the wise and fatherly stand of Swami Brahmananda which made it possible and at the same time saved the Ramakrishna Order from a grave crisis as well as from estrangement from the loving daughter of the Holy Mother, of Swamiji, and of all his brother disciples. The relation continued to remain the same as it was when Swamiji was alive. That is why after her 'dissociation' from the Math and Mission, Sister Nivedita wrote her wonderful 'Introduction' to the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in 1907 and her masterpiece *The Master as I Saw Him* in 1910, published by the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama and Udbodhan Office respectively, in addition to her occasional notes and comments in the *Prabuddha Bharata*. Swami Brahmananda (and also Swami Saradananda) always helped her in running her school financially and otherwise and in making her educational programme for women a success.

Swami Brahmananda's attention was extended to other directions also. According to Swamiji's wishes, Swami Turiyananda was to come back to India and Swami Trigunatitananda, the then editor of *Udbodhan*, was to go to San Francisco in his place. Swami Brahmananda took immediate steps to honour the wishes of Swamiji after his passing away. But it was a very difficult job to find a suitable person to replace Swami Trigunatitananda and tackle the great financial crisis that *Udbodhan* was then undergoing. Swami Brahmananda appointed Swami Shuddhananda editor and arranged for necessary funds to support the journal and started helping it with his own articles and compilations of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, and also with articles from devotees. The period between 1902 and 1912 is further remarkable because it witnessed the monumental publication of the first five volumes of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and four volumes of the *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, from the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama. Side by side with the work in India, activities in the West went on satisfactorily.

The period witnessed the success of Swami Abhedananda in New York, of Swami Trigunatitananda in San Francisco, of Swami Paramananda in Boston, and of Swami Bodhananda in Pittsburgh. During this period the Mission, under the guidance of Swami Brahmananda, undertook regular relief programmes as and when natural calamities overtook Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Punjab, or any other part of the country.

It is learnt from the biographies of Swami Brahmananda that from 1906 he kept himself busy in consultation with his brother disciples, especially Swamis Shivananda, Saradananda, Akhandananda, and Pramatha Nath Kar (Paltu Babu), the celebrated attorney, in order to give a legal status to the Mission constitution. A general meeting was convened at Belur Math to this effect in 1908 and the move was approved unanimously. The Mission was then registered on 4 May 1909 under the existing law of the land. The constitution of the Mission was framed in such a manner that the trustees of the Math would also be members of the Governing Body of the Mission in order to run the twin organizations with the common goal set by Swami Vivekananda, i.e. *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca*, and with the common source of inspiration, strength, and spirit, i.e. Sri Ramakrishna. This was indeed a great task accomplished by Swami Brahmananda during the first decade of his presidency.

During the first decade after Swamiji's passing away, Swami Brahmananda made it clear to all the members of the Order that there was no contradiction between work and spiritual practice, and he showed in his own life that a perfect balance could be struck between the two. He used to say that only by attempting to strike this balance could a monastic build up his spiritual life in the 'Ramakrishna model' as interpreted by Swamiji. To him Swamiji and Sri Ramakrishna were but the obverse and reverse of the same coin. Swami Brahmananda used to teach the monastics of the Order that all work, whether spiritual or secular, was Sri Ramakrishna's work and his only. So everybody must do his allotted work with that spirit. He told M:

> The Master came this time to make a bridge between jīva and Shiva (man and God). See how easy it has now become to realize the Lord.[13]

He said that Swami Vivekananda interpreted to the world the true import of the message of the Master, that man was potentially divine and work was

verily worship, and in order to translate this great message into reality he founded the Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Ashokananda writes:

> Swami Brahmananda, who had taken the responsibility of seeing that the Order grew as Swami Vivekananda wanted it to grow, never introduced any ideas different from those given by Swami Vivekananda. On the contrary, if anybody acted counter to Swamiji's intentions, Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] didn't hesitate to say, 'This is Swamiji's Math. If you cannot live according to his wish, leave the monastery!' He told the monks, 'Swamiji gave his very life to build up this organisation and to give you everything to facilitate your spiritual practice and growth. Try to realise the infinite love he bore you.' Yes, to the fraction of an inch, Swami Brahmananda was forever faithful to Swamiji.[14]

With this faith, trust, love, admiration, and veneration for Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda developed the movement and the organization and led them from strength to strength. In his illuminating article 'Ramakrishna Mission: The scope and Method of Its Work' in the *Indian Review* in its March 1910 number, Swami Brahmananda writes that the special features of the Ramakrishna Mission include its fight against 'fanaticism, bigotry and narrow-mindedness', its recognition of the 'harmony of religions' and 'Divinity of man', its denouncement of 'esoterism' and 'proselytisation', its emphasis on 'reason' and the 'practice of religion', and its declaration of Vedanta as the foundation of its religious ideas. Swami Brahmananda then presented his thesis justifying the claim of the Ramakrishna Mission for its special 'distinction':

> Ramakrishna Mission is distinct from all other religious missions of the past and the present as it only had discovered the harmony, the common basis, and the necessity of all the various religions, whereas each of the other religious missions of the world asserts its infallibility, perfection and supremacy over all the rest.[15]

Swami Brahmananda's article in the *Indian Review* was an emphatic assertion that the Ramakrishna Mission had perfectly assimilated the quintessence of the ideal of Vedanta and of the Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. This ideal of assimilation and harmony is the ideal of the Ramakrishna Mission. In

reference to Swami Brahmananda's article in the *Indian Review* Prof. Sankari Prasad Basu rightly comments:

> The Ramakrishna Mission thought it necessary to clarify and pronounce its own ideals. That was the purpose of Swami Brahmananda. As a Prophet of the new age, Vivekananda had his messages for both the sannyāsins and the householders. Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission being a sannyāsin organization needed a clear enunciation of its objectives. Swami Brahmananda's article served this purpose. It was, effectively, *the manifesto of the Ramakrishna Order*.[16]

The first general report of the Mission, covering the period up to 1912, mentions six Math centres and six Mission centres under the Headquarters at Belur. The list of the Math centres included the Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar (Udbodhan); Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Varanasi; Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati; Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad; Ramakrishna Math, Madras; and Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore. The Mission centres were: the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi; Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal; Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindavan; Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad; Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachi; and Ramakrishna Mission, Barisal (1911). The list, however, does not include the centre in Dhaka (1899), Sister Nivedita Girls' School in Calcutta (1898), and the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home in Madras (1905). The reason is that 'they were still in an experimental state' and their character was not specifically identified or the functions demarcated because they were actually 'discharging dual function',[17] i.e. the function of the Math as well as of the Mission. This was natural during the period of 'breaking new ground'. Swami Gambhirananda writes:

> On the whole, the Math and Mission developed upto 1912 through an internal growth of their existing branch centres.[18]

The events of the decade following Swamiji's death under Swami Brahmananda's presidency sufficiently proved the necessity of the existence of both the institutions — the Math and the Mission — both in terms of spiritual idealism and of practical spirituality. The period from 1913 till the end of Swami Brahmananda's presidency marked a definite chapter of further develop-

ment of the Order in terms of expansion and consolidation. And it is needless to add that the leadership of Swami Brahmananda was the most vital factor behind this tremendous advancement.

Swami Premananda (1861-1918)

With Swami Vivekananda's return from the West, a new chapter started in the lives and roles of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, particularly the monastic disciples. They were naturally very proud of the fantastic success Swamiji had in the West. But at the same time, as Swami Ashokananda writes, 'they were also disturbed'.[19] Swamiji principally preached Vedanta in its Advaitic aspect in the West and he rarely spoke about Sri Ramakrishna in public, except in two lectures which were later published in the form of a booklet entitled 'My Master'. He never said that Sri Ramakrishna was an Incarnation of God. He never preached Sri Ramakrishna or his life. He only talked about the principles on which Vedanta or spirituality was based. Without mentioning the name of Sri Ramakrishna he, in fact, preached Sri Ramakrishna, because Ramakrishna embodied those very principles. Swamiji knew that once the West was acquainted with these grand ideas, it would not be difficult to present the person embodying them. But some of his brother disciples, great souls though they were, did not know this, and that is why they became puzzled at his silence about Sri Ramakrishna. Moreover, they knew that Sri Ramakrishna had basically taught *bhakti* or devotion, and said that the path of *jñāna* or knowledge and the Advaitic or monistic aspect of Vedanta were not suitable for the common people. But Swamiji was advocating mainly the path of *jñāna* and the Advaitic aspect of Vedanta in the West. This apart, Swamiji in his letters to his brother disciples was saying repeatedly that they should 'minimize ritualistic worship' of Sri Ramakrishna in the monastery and try to serve the sick, the hungry, the illiterate, looking upon them as veritable images of God. This also sounded contradictory to what their Master had taught and preached. All this led some of the brother disciples to reach a 'hasty conclusion' that Swamiji 'had forgotten his Master and was going his own way'.[20]

Swami Premananda was among those who started harbouring this doubt. It was difficult for him to accept the new style of running the monastery and the missionary work started in various parts of the country under the supervision

of Swamiji. But at the same time he bore great love and admiration for his great brother disciple because he, like all the other brother disciples, knew of the fathomless love that Sri Ramakrishna had for his dearest Naren (Swamiji's premonastic name) and his behest to all of them: 'Just follow him. As you would follow me, follow him.'[21] Once Swami Premananda said to Swamiji: 'Do you think you are different from Sri Ramakrishna? We look upon you as the same as our Master.'[22]

Therefore, in spite of the differences of opinion and disagreement of views, there was no problem on the part of Swami Premananda to abide by what Swami Vivekananda wanted them to do. And it so happened that Swami Premananda alone had the occasion of listening to Swami Vivekananda for a couple of hours regarding his final dreams, plans, and his experiences in the West on the last day of his life (4 July 1902) — to be more accurate, before the last moments of his life. 'Even on this last day', Swami Ashokananda writes, 'he [Swami Vivekananda] spoke a great deal with Swami Premananda, training him, teaching him for the future.'[23]

The name 'Premananda' means 'the bliss of love', *prema* meaning 'love' and *ānanda* meaning 'bliss'. And Swami Premananda was indeed a person who embodied the bliss of love. Before Swami Vivekananda expired, he made Swami Premananda the manager of the monastery at Belur. The question may be asked, 'Why did Swami Vivekananda put someone who was doubtful about his ideas in charge of the Headquarters of the Order?' Swami Ashokananda answers:

> The main reason Swamiji chose him for this important post was the great compassion and love that Swami Premananda embodied within himself. He was able to draw innumerable people to the Math, particularly young people from Calcutta, at a crucial time for the Order. The Nationalist Movement had begun in 1906. Some historians have said that it was inspired by Swami Vivekananda himself.... The Government called in question some of Swami Vivekananda's books and looked with suspicion upon our monks. As a consequence, many people kept away from the monastery, lest they be accused of disloyalty. But Swami Premananda had such an attractive personality that in spite of everything people used to come to Belur Math just to see him, and a number of young men entered the monastery at that time through his influence.

> As the years passed, his power of attraction grew stronger and stronger; more and more young men were drawn by him to the monastery.[24]

He was fondly referred to as the 'Mother of the Math'. He was really so — so loving, so caring and so concerned he was for everyone in the Order, whether monastic or lay. Swamiji taught him that the energy of a monk must not get exhausted only in the shrine and ritualistic worship. It must be directed simultaneously towards the service of man in the spirit of service to God and towards work in the spirit of worship. So he attended to everything in the monastery with utmost care and saw that all the younger monastics were trained to live up to the ideals set by Swamiji in spiritual practice, work, service, studies, preaching, and so on. This was indeed a most important job so far as the building up of character and moulding of the minds of young monks and fresh novices were concerned. He used to talk to them continuously about the ideals of the Order and of the lives and teachings of the Master and his chief disciple. His company and his talks removed the doubts of the youngsters, and they got acquainted with the spirit of the work of the Math and Mission and with the philosophy of work in the shrine, in the kitchen, in the garden and farm, in the office, and elsewhere. 'You should learn', he said, 'how to work in every walk of life — be it a worshipper in the shrine, a cook in the kitchen, a cowherd in the cowshed, or a sweeper in the toilet. Be they great or small, all work should receive your equal attention. Always take as much care of the means as of the ends.'[25] His own example and spirit impressed on everyone who came in contact with him that the Math was the Master's and every work was his work, and every inch of the Math was holy and divine. All the time he used to say, and demonstrate by his own example, that keeping the lawns free of weeds, working in the vegetable garden, dressing the fruits and vegetables, cleaning the campus, washing the vessels, etc. were but 'so many forms of his worship'.[26]

He used to teach and train the young monks that the hours of worship in the shrine did not alone constitute the spiritual aspect of monasticism, but 'life as a whole' must turn 'into a continuous meditation'.[27] This was just what Swami Vivekananda wanted it to be. This, in fact, was the very spirit behind the Ramakrishna Mission. Throughout the rest of his life after the passing away of Swamiji, Swami Premananda thus guided and trained the

young monks and novices who lived at Belur Math. During the decade after Swamiji's death, Swami Premananda seldom spent a night outside Belur Math except for his short stays on four occasions in Puri in 1904, 1906, and 1907, and except when he visited Amarnath, Kankhal, Hardwar, and Varanasi in 1910. Swami Brahmananda, the then President of the Math and Mission, often stayed outside Belur Math visiting different centres or travelling in various parts of India. Swami Premananda stayed at Belur Math and looked after every detail of the Math administration and guided and trained the young monks to inculcate the art of perfection in every action and the lessons of practical Vedanta in everyday life. No work was insignificant to him or beneath his dignity. He used to teach:

> Every work here is sacred. Whether you cut vegetables, whether you prepare cowdung-balls, whether you go out to give lectures or worship in the chapel — everything is service unto the Lord. You have to learn to do everything with an equal sense of reverence and sanctity in your heart.[28]

He continuously tried to impress upon the minds of the monks that they must be devoid of all shortcomings and flaws and become perfect in every work and in every aspect of character. If a young monk peeled a potato a little deep, he would rebuke him very sternly, but he was quick to forgive and forget also. Most softly he would tell him that these vegetables had been bought with the hard-earned money of the devotees and it was therefore not at all right to slight them. He used to tell the monks that they must be devoid of ego, of carelessness, and of worldly ambitions and aspirations. He explained the necessity of this training of perfection:

> My boys, one day you will have to do very responsible things. If you don't learn the habit of responsibility in small things, you will not learn the habit of responsibility in big things. You will cheat.[29]

With this end in view he was a strict disciplinarian and hard taskmaster and did not fail to chastise the monks when it was necessary. But he was love through and through. Swami Ashokananda recalls:

> He would make them study, he would make them serve, he would teach them everything. His care was endless.[30]

'Life inspires life.'[31] Swami Premananda's life went on inspiring the young monks and made a deep impression on their minds. Swami Gnaneswarananda recalls:

> We were weeding the Math garden. Swami Premananda was watching us and he noticed that one of the boys was not pulling the weeds out by the roots. He called out to him, 'My boy, you must pull the weeds out by the roots; otherwise, you are simply fooling yourself and wasting time. If you do not realize the necessity of rooting out weeds in the garden, how can you weed out your old faults and tendencies? How can you understand the real meaning of spiritual life?' And he added, significantly, 'Weed out, boys! Weed out, root and all.'[32]

What was most urgently needed in those early days of the Order, particularly after the passing away of Swamiji, was this training and the orientation and building up of character of the brahmachārins — that is, imprinting the ideas and spirit of practical Vedanta on the minds of the new generation of monks, most of whom did not have the opportunity to come in touch with Swamiji. And this job was extremely difficult and definitely more important than the construction of buildings and expansion of the activities of the Order. To Swamiji practical Vedanta meant the harmonization of the four yogas — *karma*, *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *rāja* or *dhyāna*. Swami Premananda, through his own blazing example, inspired and encouraged 'a whole generation' of monks to practise this great ideal bequeathed to the world by Swami Vivekananda. In Swami Premananda's time many young men joined the Order and accepted 'the ideal of worship of God through the service of man' and among them many emerged as 'wonderfully capable and selfless workers in the Order'. For this wonderful achievement, 'at least fifty per cent of the credit should go to him (Swami Premananda)'.[33]

Although Swami Premananda initially disagreed with Swamiji's style of work and way of presenting the Master's message, he gradually started changing his stand. In spite of his misgivings and disagreement he surrendered himself to the hard training given to him by Swamiji himself. This had irresistible effect on him during the first decade after Swamiji's death, and we have already seen how sincerely he tried to train the monastics according to the mould and ideal of Swamiji. But the greatest part was yet to come,

when his change became complete and final. He became converted into the most vocal and ardent advocate of Swamiji and his ideal. That great transformation took place in 1913 — more than a decade after Swamiji's passing away. Swami Ashokananda happened to be an eye-witness to this metamorphosis. He writes:

> It came about after his recovery from a severe illness. For more than a year he convalesced in the hospital in the Order's Benares centre, and he decided to take that opportunity to read all the books of Swami Vivekananda. Although he knew some English, he read the Bengali translation of Swamiji's *Complete Works*, and by the time he had finished he was just transformed. He used to say in season and out, as if to make amends for his long disagreement, 'I am a disciple of Swami Vivekananda.' People were astonished to see this change in him. He himself told me of it.
>
> One day in the autumn of 1913, I went to Belur Math with two college friends. We found Swami Premananda alone, and he talked with us. 'You see these chairs and tables and all this furniture?' he said. 'When Swamiji came back from America in 1897 and wanted all these things, we were just shocked. We had seen different ways with our Master, Sri Ramakrishna. He had lived in a simple room — no furniture, nothing. There were just two cots; there he sat and there he slept. He never wanted to hear of anything but God. He was full of God; he would talk about God, sing about God, go into ecstasies in the name of God, enter into samādhi. He taught us those things; he didn't teach us about all this organization or about hospitals, schools, magazines. So we said, "Swamiji is changing the ways of the Master; he is teaching something entirely different." We couldn't feel reconciled to it. But as time has gone on, I have become convinced that unless we look at Sri Ramakrishna through the eyes of Swamiji, we will not know what he was, what he wanted us to do.' He began to get excited; he said, 'I am a disciple of Swamiji now. If you ever want to understand Sri Ramakrishna, read the works of Swamiji. Think about him. Do what he asked us to do. That is the only way!' Many times later on he used to say this in public, and he would tell the young monks. 'Go and meditate on Swami Vivekananda. First of all be filled with his consciousness, then you will be ready to understand Sri Ramakrishna.'

He became a fiery preacher of the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. A great missionary zeal came into him. He took every opportunity to go out and lecture, and he would call to young men to come and dedicate themselves to Swamiji's cause. He became like a powerful magnet. He was often invited to speak in different parts of Bengal. Sometimes he would command audiences of several thousand people and give long talks. He would just speak fire.

Even his appearance had become more spirited after his conversion to Swamiji's ideas.[34]

The process which started in 1897 under Swamiji and in his company reached its efflorescence after sixteen years in 1913 with Swamiji again with his *Complete Works*. And this efflorescence in the life of Swami Premananda was not an isolated event in the history of the Ramakrishna Mission. It contributed enormously to the consolidation and growth of the whole movement and its ideal on the one hand, and to the sustenance and strength of the organization on the other. That is indeed a fantastic story and claims elaborate discussion. But, at present, that is outside the purview of our present discussion.

Swami Turiyananda (1863-1922)

Himself a realized soul, Swami Turiyananda was a very austere monk. This brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda was also vastly read. He had a remarkable command over the Hindu scriptures, viz. the Upaniṣads, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Patañjala Darśana*, *Nāradīya Bhakti Sūtra*, and *Yoga-Vaśiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa*. He was well conversant with the writings of the great medieval saints of India like Chaitanya, Kabir, Tulsidas, Surdas, and Mirabai. The collection of his letters entitled *Swami Turiyānander Patra* is replete with references to the above-mentioned sources and serves as a fountain of inspiration and infallible guidance to earnest spiritual seekers. Although his studies covered a very wide range, his special and final interest was pin-pointed on Advaita Vedanta and he became a great authority on the Vedantic scriptures. He never wrote any article, nor did he author any book. He once said to a monk: 'Whatever I have to give to the world, that I have given through my letters.'[35]

His life was not devoted so much to 'work' as Swami Vivekananda wanted, but his life and his exposition of the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda contributed immensely to building up the logic behind the 'work' of the Ramakrishna Mission. His entire life was devoted to austerities, spiritual disciplines, spiritual dialogues, introspection, and contemplation. He left the Baranagore Math in 1889 to practise spiritual austerities and lead the life of a wandering monk. After spending several years in severe austerities and wandering in the Himalayas and other holy places in North, Central, and West India, he came back to the Math, then located at Alambazar, in the latter part of 1896. Swami Vivekananda returned from the West in February 1897 and founded the Ramakrishna Mission in May 1897. Before founding the Ramakrishna Mission, Swamiji, under medical advice, stayed in Darjiling for more than a month in the interest of his broken health. He was accompanied by some of his brother disciples, including Swami Turiyananda. In Darjiling he was much occupied with the thought and plan for starting the Ramakrishna Mission. There he once said to Swami Turiyananda: 'I shall revolutionize the monastic order.'[36]

The foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission, when it actually took place, burst upon the age-old heritage of Hindu monasticism and brought about a real 'revolution'. In Darjiling Swamiji made another very remarkable statement to Swami Turiyananda. There he was more specific about his new plan. Swamiji said:

> Brother Hari, I have made a new path and opened it to all. Up till now it was thought that liberation could be attained only by meditation, repetition of God's names, spiritual discussion and so forth. Now young men and women will attain liberation by doing the Lord's work.[37]

Though out and out traditional in his outlook, Swami Turiyananda did not fail to appreciate the necessity and significance of Swami Vivekananda's new move and new ideal. He said later:

> Swamiji has given a new shape to the traditional Order of sannyāsins, according to the need of the age.[38]

Swami Vivekananda made some rules for the monastics which included regular study of the scriptures. Sometimes Swamiji himself, when he was at the Math, would give classes. Swami Turiyananda was also a popular exponent

of the scriptures to the junior monks. He used to explain and discuss the scriptures in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, as directed by Swamiji. Swamiji said that unless one was conversant with the life and teachings of Sri Ramkrishna, one could not understand rightly what had been discussed in the Vedas and Vedanta and the Purāṇas, because Sri Ramakrishna was 'the living commentary' on our scriptures. Swami Turiyananda tried to follow the instructions of their leader to the minutest detail. He also took part in other activities of the Math including dressing the vegetables. While engaged in such activities, he used to infuse strong spiritual energy and enthusiasm into the minds of the junior monks and novices with his inspiring talks, conversations, songs, and chants.[39] This continued whether the Math was stationed at Alambazar or at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house at Belur or at Belur Math itself, till he left for the West with Swamiji and Sister Nivedita in June 1899.

Swami Vivekananda expressed his desire to send Swami Turiyananda to the West to preach Vedanta and to strengthen the cause of his Western mission. But because of his inherent inclination for the life of contemplation, solitude, and study, Swami Turiyananda was not at all agreeable to the idea of going to the West. He preferred to spend his days in spiritual disciplines, study of the scriptures, and conducting scripture classes for the junior monks at the monastery. But he had to surrender his preference to Swami Vivekananda's entreaties when the latter appealed to him with tears in his eyes:

> Brother, can't you see I have been laying down my life, inch by inch, in fulfilling the mission of the Master till I am on the verge of death? Can you merely stand looking on and not come to my aid by relieving me of a part of my great burden?[40]

The command of the leader came in the form of a genuine and fervent appeal and Swami Turiyananda had no other alternative but to accede to it. Thereafter Swami Turiyananda began the Western chapter of his life. After visiting England he and Swami Vivekananda sailed for America on 16 August 1899 and reached New York on 23 August 1899.

How would he assist Swami Vivekananda in fulfilling the mission of the Master in the land of worldly enjoyments? This was his natural question. Swami Vivekananda gave him one advice: 'Don't trouble yourself about lecturing.

You just live the life. Be an example to them. Let them see how men of renunciation live.'[41] He also said: 'Hoist the flag of Vedanta.... Destroy even the memory of India.'[42]

Swami Turiyananda perfectly fulfilled the wishes of Swami Vivekananda. He stayed two years and nine months in America — from 23 August 1899 till 6 June 1902. During this period he conducted classes and lectures on Vedanta in New York, New Jersey, Cambridge, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland. He started a new retreat at San Antonio Valley in California and named it 'Shanti Ashrama'. He had signal success in America in preaching Vedanta and living the ideal in every moment of his life. His spiritual ministration in Shanti Ashrama was simply superb. There he perfectly blended the 'sacred' and the 'secular', as Swami Vivekananda taught and preached. Ida Ansell, who used to take notes of the class talks of Swami Turiyananda at Shanti Ashrama, writes in her memoirs that one day she sharpened her pencil with a blunt knife. Because of the bluntness of the knife the point was not smooth and symmetrical. Swami Turiyananda kept a very close watch on the students and their work. He noticed that her pencil had not been properly sharpened and he did not like it. So he himself took the pencil and with the same knife sharpened the point perfectly and handed it over to her. Ida Ansell writes that Swami Turiyananda thus taught her a great lesson in practical Vedanta. Swami Turiyananda said to her:

> Make every act an act of worship. Whatever you do; do it as an offering to the Mother and do it as perfectly as you can.[43]

He sailed for India on 6 June 1902 and reached Calcutta on 14 July. Meanwhile Swami Vivekananda had passed away on 4 July 1902. Naturally the blow was too severe for Swami Turiyananda, and to recover from the shock he went on a pilgrimage to Vrindavan towards the end of October 1902. Thus he again returned to 'his first life — a life of contemplation'.[44] His stay for about three years in America, the land of 'affluence and influence', failed to affect his life and his spirit of renunciation and austerities. From the end of October 1902 till 21 July 1922, when he breathed his last, Swami Turiyananda passed his days in severe austerities, spiritual discussions, and spiritual talks. From 1902 to 1912 he stayed in Almora, Hardwar, Rishikesh, Uttarkashi, Kurukshetra, Nangol, Kankhal, Puri, and Dehra Dun. His stay in these places

was, however, interspersed with short stays at Belur Math. From April 1915 he began to stay in Almora and started a beautiful retreat there for the monastics, known as 'The Ramakrishna Cottage'. But from February 1919 he spent his last days in Varanasi. During the last years he developed a feeling of remorse for not taking up active work as advocated by Swami Vivekananda. But in his inspiring letters he tried to strongly and distinctly defend Swamiji's ideal of practical Vedanta. We are reminded here of some lines from one of his letters to a monk of the Ramakrishna Order which reflect his great reverence for the ideal of Swamiji and the ideal of the Ramakrishna Mission:

> You have written about being entangled in work; such apprehension of yours, it seems to me, is baseless. There is nothing wrong in doing work; otherwise how can one have the purification of the mind? It is when one works that one is tested: How much craving for the result of action does one have? How desireless is the mind? How much selfishness has gone and how much still remains? All this can be known only through the performance of work. When divine love dawns in the heart, one no longer considers work as mere work — it turns into worship. That is real devotion.
>
> In the beginning of spiritual life, one should practise both work and worship — focusing the mind on the Ideal. Later, such a time will come, by God's grace, when there will be no difference between meditation and action. Everything will be transformed into worship, for God pervades everything.[45]

This is not the only letter in which Swami Turiyananda, the confirmed Vedantin, lends his full support to the philosophy of practical Vedanta — the philosophy of selfless work, of work for 'Him', i.e. God — advocated by Swami Vivekananda, which constitutes the essence of the spirit of the Ramakrishna Mission. There are other letters as well expressing the same spirit, which amply testify to his faith and conviction. We quote for instance the following excerpts from two of his letters written to two monks of the Order:

> Why do you pay so much attention to the fruits of action? Go on doing your work.... Do your duty.... Go on doing your work silently, and the result will ensue by itself. The mystic saint Ramprasad sang:

'Do your work with the steadfastness
Of a hereditary farmer.
Make the effort with all of your mind,
Then you will reap a golden harvest.'

That is all.[46]

To do Swamiji's work and to practise spiritual disciplines — are they different? I do not know any other spiritual discipline but to become 'His' — to become 'His' by any means whatsoever, and that is all. To become 'His' — this is the end of *sādhanā*. Is there anything more?[47]

In fact, Swami Turiyananda was the theoretical exponent of Swamiji's ideal of service and work, and Swami Saradananda, who will be taken up next in our discussion, was the chief functionary who guided the entire Order in putting the ideal into implementation and practice.

Swami Saradananda (1865-1927)

As a garland-maker picks many flowers of different colours and creates a beautiful wreath, so Sri Ramakrishna chose his disciples from the companions of previous divine incarnations and trained them to carry his message...in this present age. On 23 December 1885 Sri Ramakrishna remarked about Shashi [later Swami Ramakrishnananda] and Sharat [later Swami Saradananda]: 'In a vision I saw that Shashi and Sharat had been among the followers of Christ.'

Pointing to his foremost disciple Peter, Christ said, 'Upon this rock I will build my church.' Later on, Peter's unshakable faith, indomitable energy, and unflinching love for his Lord gave a tremendous impetus to early Christianity. Just as Peter supported the early Christian church, Sharat carried the heavy responsibility of the young Ramakrishna Movement for over thirty years. Sharat was completely unaware of his future role when, one day at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna sat upon his lap in an ecstatic mood and later explained to the curious devotees, 'I was testing how much weight he could bear.'[48]

This is how Swami Chetanananda begins the sketch of Swami Saradananda in his great book *God Lived with Them*. It should be mentioned here

that on his way to England in March 1896 Swami Saradananda visited St. Peter's Cathedral in the Vatican. When he stood in front of the statue of St. Peter, he became absorbed in a deep trance which definitely awakened memories of his previous incarnation indicated by Sri Ramakrishna.

We may recall another remark of Sri Ramakrishna about Sharat. One day at Dakshineswar, the Master said to Sharat: 'Your ideal is Shiva. In you lie dormant the attributes of Shiva.'[49] Later developments will show how this mystical utterance of the Master was fulfilled in Swami Saradananda's life. Not only this, the other remarks of the Master about Swami Saradananda as well were not just simple remarks. They were pregnant with great significance. Nobody, including Swami Saradananda himself, could decipher their import when they had been uttered. But they could not escape the 'third eye' of Swami Vivekananda. Ever since Swami Saradananda met Sri Ramakrishna, the latter was very eager that both Sharat and Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda) get to know each other. When Sri Ramakrishna heard from Sharat that he and Narendra had become good friends, his joy knew no bounds. He remarked with a smile: 'A housewife knows which lid will go with which cooking pot.'[50] Swami Vivekananda had a unique intellect that could make out the real significance of every action and utterance of the Master. He got the Master's hint that Swami Saradananda was destined to be a very dependable assistant. He knew the other remarks of the Master about Swami Saradananda also, and he never failed to catch what the Master wanted to convey through them. He knew that the Ramakrishna Order was the body of Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Saradananda, with his 'Shiva-character' of readily and ungrudgingly swallowing the poison of life, had been marked out by the Master as the 'rock' to carry the 'weight' of the onerous responsibilities of its huge administration.

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Saradananda, like his brother disciples, spent several years practising austerities and wandering, and finally returned to the Alambazar Math in 1894 and began to spend his days in study, spiritual disciplines, and nursing those who were sick. In the latter part of 1895, Swami Vivekananda wrote to the Alambazar Math asking for an assistant for his work in the West, and the brother disciple he selected was Swami Saradananda. Swami Saradananda reached London on 1 April 1896 and from there, at the behest of Swamiji, he sailed for America accompanied by J. J. Goodwin. He arrived in New York on 2 July 1896. He met

remarkable success and carried on with great ability the Vedanta work in America started by Swamiji. Meanwhile Swamiji had returned to India and founded the Ramakrishna Mission on 1 May 1897. Although Swami Saradananda was able to create 'a profound impression'[51] in every level of the American society, and to win 'for him a large number of friends, admirers and devotees',[52] his stay in America had to be cut short at the call of Swamiji. Swamiji wanted him back in India to help him organize the work of the Math and the newly started Ramakrishna Mission.

On 12 January 1898 Swami Saradananda left America en route to India via London, Paris, Naples, Rome, and the Vatican, and on 8 February 1898 he arrived at the Math, then located at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house at Belur. Swamiji was quite relieved to have him as his assistant because he had great qualities of head, heart, and hand, together with his natural poise and calmness of mind. By now he had acquired an additional qualification — his Western experience and acquaintance with methods of organization. Swamiji knew that the level-headedness and even-mindedness of Swami Saradananda coupled with his acquaintance with Western methods of organization were what the new organization needed most at that point of 'breaking new ground' for its consolidation, development, and onward march. Swamiji appointed Swami Saradananda Secretary or chief executive of the twin institutions — the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission — in 1898, an office he was to hold for the rest of his life. For about thirty years Swami Saradananda was 'the chief organizer'[53] of the Ramakrishna Order and its activities.

As the executive head of the Order, Swami Saradananda not only looked after the administration, but also personally watched over the physical, mental, and spiritual growth of every younger monastic. He presented his own life as a living example of how a monk should behave and live. When Swamiji sailed for the West on his second visit on 20 June 1899, Swami Saradananda devoted a major share of his busy administrative schedule to the training of the novices and the new generation of monks at Belur Math. He used to hold classes on the scriptures and inspire the monks to develop their spiritual growth by means of japa and meditation and by practising Swamiji's ideal of Karma Yoga or practical Vedanta. He was absolutely democratic in his style of administration and used to look upon everyone, even the juniormost member of the Order, as his equal.

This he learnt from Swamiji. His assessment of a situation or judgement of a person was always based on steady analysis of every possible aspect. He never took any hasty decision. On 9 December 1900 Swamiji suddenly returned to Belur Math from the West. One of the reasons for Swamiji's coming back so early was that he had an intuition that he would die soon and therefore he hastened to return to Belur Math to see the progress of the work he had started. During these days Swamiji was very restless in order to complete his work and that was why he was very tough and harsh in his dealings with his brother disciples. No one could dare face him in those moments of fury except Swami Saradananda. His temper was so cool that he could eventually pacify Swamiji's terrible temper, which was absolutely essential for the latter's broken health.

The fullest manifestation of his powers, however, was evident after Swamiji's passing away on 4 July 1902. Swami Saradananda had to bear since then practically the brunt of the responsibilities of the organization and its full executive work-load. He, however, always consulted Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Order, regarding any vital decision. Immediately after Swamiji's passing away, Swami Saradananda and Swami Brahmananda had to tackle two grave crises. One was Sister Nivedita's dissociation from the Ramakrishna Order, and the other was the crisis of the management of *Udbodhan*, the Bengali organ of the Order, following Swami Trigunatitananda's departure for America to replace Swami Turiyananda. Both the crises were successfully handled under the leadership of Swami Brahmananda, but Swami Saradananda's share in tackling them was no less important. It should be mentioned here that later, from 1908 to 1912, Swami Saradananda took upon himself the responsibility of editorship of *Udbodhan* together with his usual responsibilities as the head of the Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar, and as the Secretary of the whole Order. These few years under his editorship witnessed the height of *Udbodhan's* merit as an organ of the Order. He also took a major role in giving the Mission legal status, framing its constitution, and organizing its registration on 4 May 1909. It is true that all these were the fruits of the prolonged thought and labour of Swami Brahmananda, the then President, but as Secretary, Swami Saradananda was obviously the most important person to assist him and the most dependable assistant to offer the right guidance.

Swami Saradananda's next important contribution was to solve the problem of a permanent residence for the Holy Mother in Calcutta, and the

problem of a permanent house for *Udbodhan* as well as for Udbodhan Office, the primary Bengali publication wing of the Order. Swami Saradananda built a house at Baghbazar, the upper storey of which was reserved for the Holy Mother and the ground floor was used for the journal and the publication office. The Udbodhan Office was installed in the new building, which became immediately known as 'Mother's House' and 'Udbodhan', towards the end of 1908, and it was sanctified by the Holy Mother's arrival on 23 May 1909. Going against the wishes of many, Swami Saradananda borrowed money at his own risk to construct this building. But this had tremendous consequences on the whole history of the Ramakrishna Movement, as it was the motivation for the publication of Swami Saradananda's monumental biography of Sri Ramakrishna in Bengali, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*. Swami Saradananda himself spoke of three reasons for undertaking this great work. Firstly, he said it was to repay the money borrowed to build Holy Mother's house. Secondly, as editor of *Udbodhan* he used to get many articles on Sri Ramakrishna which were full of inaccuracies and misrepresentations. As one of the direct disciples he thought it was his sacred responsibility to put in print the accurate biography of the Master and the correct interpretation of his teachings. Thirdly, he wanted to remove the misconception that the philanthropic activities of the Ramakrishna Mission initiated by Swami Vivekananda were contrary to what Sri Ramakrishna taught. Even M., the illustrious recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, had been heard to comment that Swami Vivekananda and the other monastic disciples of the Master 'changed the focus' of his teaching from God-realization to social service and thus took a wrong path. The book in five volumes first appeared in *Udbodhan* in November 1909, and it was serialized for several years. In book form it was first published in 1911. The series was completed in 1919. The book rendered invaluable service to the Ramakrishna Movement as a whole and also enriched Bengali literature. It is no exaggeration to say that Bengali literature would have been poorer without this great classic. This great book is not just a biography par exellence; it is much more than that. Besides being the most accurate biography so far as the factual contents are concerned, it also offers the most authentic interpretation of the unique life, *sādhanā*, and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

There are many other areas where Swami Saradananda helped the Order by way of contributing to its consolidation, growth, and development, but the

Lilaprasanga stands out as his greatest contribution. Had there been no other work to his credit, this single book was enough and more to make his name immortal not only in the history of the Ramakrishna Order, but in the history of man also. For writing the *Lilaprasanga*, Swami Saradananda had the direct blessings of the Holy Mother, who put the stamp of the highest authenticity on it by commenting, 'Everything has been written correctly in Sharat's book.'[54] By writing it he also fulfilled the wishes of Swami Vivekananda, who once expressed his desire that Swami Saradananda would write the biography of the Master.[55] As an integral part of his service to the Master and the Order, Swami Saradananda also took upon himself the responsibility of looking after and serving the Holy Mother as her *dwāri* (door-keeper) and *bhāri* (burden-bearer). From 1904 to 1920 he left no stone unturned to make her stay most comfortable whether she was in her native village or in her Calcutta residence or elsewhere. Referring to Swami Saradananda, she used to say, 'I do not see anybody else who can shoulder my burden.'[56]

As the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Saradananda had to tackle so many difficult situations, but he was always seen unperturbed and absolutely composed. He was totally fearless. In 1909 he accorded permission to two former revolutionaries, Debabrata Basu and Sachindra Nath Sen, to join the Order knowing fully well that it would earn the displeasure of the British police and Government, and that it may even lead to a total ban on the activities of the Mission. Both of the young men later became great workers of the organization and became known as Swami Prajnananda and Swami Chinmayananda. In 1912 Priyanath Dasgupta, another former revolutionary, joined the Order and later became Swami Atmaprakashananda. For this young man the police summoned Swami Saradananda and behaved with him most discourteously, but Swami Saradananda maintained his usual gentle and dignified manner. The problem with the police and the Government did not end there, since many former revolutionaries kept joining the Order over those years, and it reached a very crucial turn in 1916 when Lord Carmichael, the then Governor of Bengal, made some damaging statements against the Ramakrishna Mission, declaring its connection with politics. Although the event belongs to the period beyond the limit of our discussion, it must be said that during this crisis and all other crises preceding or succeeding it, Swami Saradananda took the organization with his calm, judicious, and bold leadership in

the right direction with dignity and esteem and without yielding on any vital principle.[57]

Swami Saradananda exemplified in his life the great message of Swami Vivekananda — 'Service to man is service to God' and 'Work is worship', which constitutes the cornerstone of the edifice called the 'Ramakrishna Mission'. During his tenure as secretary the Ramakrishna Mission never failed to serve the suffering people whenever they had been affected by any disaster or calamity like epidemic, flood, famine, earthquake, etc. It was he who recorded in the *Lilaprasanga* the incident that was the source of Swamiji's ideal of service and work known as 'Practical Vedanta' and of all the philanthropic activities and service-programmes of the Ramakrishna Mission. We have mentioned the incident at the very beginning of our discussion. Swami Gambhirananda records Swami Saradananda's advice given to two devotees on two different occasions which clearly highlight his attitude towards service and work:

> (Regarding serving people at the time of a calamity) You will just give the money to others that has been given to us by others. What will you yourself give then? You will give your heart, your soul, your mind, and your love.[58]
>
> If you want to work, depend on God and stand on your own feet. Don't depend on any human being — even myself. If nobody comes forward to help your work, resolve to do it alone, even at the cost of your body. When you have such courage, strength, and dependence on God, only then are you eligible to do work.[59]

Swami Saradananda did not just give such advice to others; he himself demonstrated these ideas in his own life and actions. To him work was verily worship. Every work, however small it might be, was to him Sri Ramakrishna's work and his worship. His mind always remained engrossed in the thought of Sri Ramakrishna, and he was absolutely loyal to Swami Vivekananda and to his ideal and mission. He said: 'All through my life I worked, envisioning the faces of the Master and Swamiji. I had no time to pay any attention to others' opinions.'[60]

Swami Saradananda not only harmonized *karma* and *jñāna*, but also *bhakti* and *dhyāna*, and actualized a balance of the yogas within himself, which made

him, as Swami Gambhirananda says, 'the most balanced man in the whole Order.'[61]

Swami Saradananda constantly felt that he was just an instrument of the Master and that he was fortunate to have been given the blessed privilege of serving the cause of the Master and Swamiji. This was his very spirit. Sister Devamata writes in her memoirs of Swami Saradananda:

> No disciple ever served his Master's cause with greater fervour and steadfastness than did he.[62]

Keeping the outline of this great soul before us, we may try to realize why Swami Vivekananda once said: 'The Master brought Sharat for his work.'[63]

Conclusion

The foregoing survey sufficiently shows that during Swamiji's lifetime and after his demise, the four great architects of the Order — Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda, Swami Turiyananda, and Swami Saradananda — devoted themselves fully and totally to building the organization physically as well as ideologically and spiritually. All of them being trustees of the Math and members of the Governing Body of the Mission, followed their leader and their Master in every footstep. They left before the later generations ideological reaffirmation and spiritual reassertion, and thus led the organization and the Movement on their march from growth to growth, from strength to strength.

The time span covered in the present discussion, from 1897 to 1912, is very important in the history of the organization and the Movement and in the process of the evolution of the Order. Let us sum up our discussion in the words of Swami Gambhirananda, the illustrious historian of the Order:

> The Ramakrishna Math and Mission expanded and grew in strength notwithstanding, or perhaps with the help of, reverses; for at each challenge from external hurdles, the organisation had to reassert its fundamental tenets in a fresh context and thus gain in clarity of thought and boldness of action. There were temporary set-backs to be sure; but the old saying, 'Failures are the pillars of success', proved true here as elsewhere, because of the sincerity

of purpose, the firmness of faith and the deathlessness of the original impulse.[64]

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12 Swami Gambhirananda, *Sri Ma Sarada Devi* [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1984], p. 292, Vide also Swami Prabhananda, *Brahmananda-charit* [3rd ed. 2000], pp. 149-150; and Swami Gambhirananda, *History*, p.181.

13 *The Eternal Companion*, p. 158.

14 *Swami Brahmananda*, p. 35.

15 Quoted in Sankari Prasad Basu, *Swami Vivekananda in Contemporary Indian News* [Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1997], p. 86.

16 Ibid.

17 *History*, p.180.

18 Ibid.

19 Swami Ashokananda, *Swami Premananda* [San Francisco: Vedanta Society of Northern California, 1970], p. 15. Hereafter Swami Premananda.

[20] Ibid., p.16.

[21] Ibid., p.18.

[22] Ibid., p. 21.

[23] Ibid., p. 24.

[24] Ibid., p. 25-26.

[25] *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1933, p. 596.

[26] *History*, p.124.

[27] Ibid.

[28] *Swami Premananda*, p. 32.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. 33.

[31] Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* [St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1997], p. 210. Hereafter *God Lived with Them*.

[32] Swami Prabhavananda (ed. & Trans.), *Memories of A Loving Soul: Swami Premananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1996], pp. 20–21.

[33] *Swami Premananda*, p. 27.

[34] Ibid., pp. 27–29.

[35] Swami Chetanananda (ed. & trans.), *Spiritual Treasures : Letters of Swami Turiyananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994], p. 7. Hereafter *Spiritual Treasure*.

[36] *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.II, p. 242.

[37] Swami Ritajananda, *Swami Turiyananda* [Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1973], p.18.

[38] *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 242.

[39] Swami Prabhananda, *Ramakrishna Mather Ādikatha* [Calcutta: Udbodhan office, 2001], p. 124.

[40] *Swami Turiyananda*, p. 43.

[41] Ibid., p. 51.

[42] Ibid., p. 54.

[43] *Vedanta and West*, 1952, p. 141.

[44] *God Lived with Them*, p. 382.

[45] *Spiritual Treasures*, p. 36 [Letter to Swami Vishuddhananda, dated 4 February 1908].

[46] Ibid., p. 59 [Letter to Swami Nirupamananda, dated 14 December 1912].

[47] Swami Shraddhananda, *Atiter Smriti* [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 3rd ed., 1381 BS], p. 171 [Letter to Swami Virajananda, dated 9 November 1913].

[48] *God Lived with Them*, p. 309.

[49] Swami Gambhirananda, *Sri Ramakrishna-Bhaktamalika* [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office,

4th ed. 1379 BS], p. 306. Hereafter *Sri Ramakrishna-Bhaktamalika*.

[50] Swami Gambhirananda, *The Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1967], p.175.

[51] Swami Prabhananda, *Saradananda Charit* [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 2nd ed. 1997], p. 107.

[52] Ibid., p. 109.

[53] *God Lived with Them*, p. 329.

[54] Ibid., p. 336.

[55] Ibid., p. 335.

[56] Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* [New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1962], p. 270.

[57] For fuller information vide *History*, pp. 169-178; *God Lived with Them*, pp. 338-340; and Swami Aseshananda, *Glimpses of a Great Soul*: *A Portrait of Swami Saradananda* [Portland: Vedanta Society of Portland, Oregon, 1982], pp. 35-38.

[58] *Sri Ramakrishna-Bhaktamalika*, p.340.

[59] Ibid., p. 336.

[60] *God Lived with Them*, p. 345.

[61] *History*, pp. 124-125.

[62] *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1932, p. 554.

[63] *God Lived with Them*, p. 338.

[64] *History*, p. 179.

The Other Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna

SWAMI GAHANANANDA

Introduction

THE SPIRITUAL RENAISSANCE heralded by the advent of Sri Ramakrishna marked the dawn of a new era of spiritual awakening and religious unity based on his spiritual experiences. Among his disciples it was Swami Vivekananda who first perceived the universality of his Master's message and the subtle but strong humanistic impulse enshrined in it. The overwhelming response with which his Master's universal message was received convinced Swamiji of its immense relevance for the individual and collective welfare of mankind. So he set out to give a new momentum to the process in the form of a permanent organization which would preserve and pass on the legacy of Sri Ramakrishna to the future generations.

In this stupendous task he heavily banked upon substantial cooperation from his ever-trusted brother disciples, who meanwhile had developed into robust spiritual stalwarts. Persuaded by their leader, all of them zealously dedicated themselves to the task of translating the vision of their leader into reality. Even a cursory glance at the lives of some of these apostles gives us an idea of the unique role each one of them played in promoting the ideas and ideals of the Mission.

The life of Swami Vivekananda has already been dealt with in an earlier chapter of this volume, and so have been the lives of the four other disciples

of Sri Ramakrishna who broke new ground for the work of the Ramakrishna Mission. In the present article I am dealing with the remaining eleven disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. They are Swamis Shivananda, Ramakrishnananda, Abhedananda, Adbhutananda, Advaitananda, Vijnanananda, Akhandananda, Yogananda, Niranjanananda, Trigunatitananda, and Subodhananda.

Swami Shivananda

It was the incredibly pure, holy, and enlightened life of Taraknath Ghoshal, later Swami Shivananda, that prompted Swami Vivekananda to call him a 'Mahapurush' — great soul — by which name (Mahapurush Maharaj) he became popularly known in the Ramakrishna circle. Born in Barasat, a small village near Calcutta, in 1854, he had a pious nature from his boyhood. Love for high ideals and an inclination towards the formless aspect of the Divine were some of the main traits of young Taraknath's mental make-up. He had, however, a place in his heart for love and reverence for gods and goddesses also — an attitude which blossomed in a sweet and sublime way in his later years. Young Taraknath often felt a yearning for proper spiritual guidance and the experience of spiritual bliss. But contemporary religious leaders and preachers could not help him. It was in Sri Ramakrishna that he found the fulfilment of his soul's yearning. During his days in Dakshineswar and Cossipore (1880-1886), Sri Ramakrishna led him step by step to the heights of spiritual realization and ecstatic joy, and instilled in him a very balanced approach towards life and spirituality. To him, Sri Ramakrishna was not only his guru but also his mother, for he had lost his earthly mother at the age of nine.

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away in 1886, Taraknath immersed himself in intense meditation at the Baranagore and Alambazar Maths. He formally took the holy vow of sannyāsa at the Baranagore Math, and received the name Swami Shivananda. From the Baranagore and Alambazar Maths, Swami Shivananda set out a number of times on pilgrimage to different holy places in India till Swami Vivekananda's return from the West in 1897. Thereafter he settled down at Belur Math, taking part in the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission. Although the natural bent of his mind was to lead a contemplative life, he accepted the ideal of service introduced by Swami Vivekananda, for whom he felt extraordinary love and respect.

In 1910 Swami Shivananda was made the Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and from 1917 he also served the Math as its Manager. After Swami Brahmananda passed away in 1922, Swami Shivananda became President of the twin institutions. As President, he travelled to various places of India, helping to propagate the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Several new centres of the Order were started during his tenure, and he gave spiritual initiation to a large number of devotees. Swami Shivananda maintained a loving relationship with his brother disciples, guided young monks in the path of renunciation and service, and became a lighthouse of hope to scores of lay devotees struggling in the sea of worldly existence. Towards the end of his life, a paralytic stroke crippled him, but even then no one was deprived of his blessings, which he indicated by raising his left hand, till the end of his life in 1934.

Although indrawn and contemplative by nature, Swami Shivananda gave himself fully to the work of the Ramakrishna Mission, chiefly at the inspiration and insistence of Swami Vivekananda. Once he remarked: 'Only after travelling over the globe from one end to the other and scrutinizing it closely did Swamiji found this Math and Mission to carry on activities beneficial to the world and particularly to India, according to the directions of the Master. One by one, Swamiji engaged us all in these activities. If we had so wished, we could very well have lived a life of exclusive contemplation and meditation in mountains and forests. As a matter of fact, most of us had been away from the monastery in different places, doing that to some extent. It was Swamiji who called us together and engaged us in different forms of service — the service of God in humanity. Even in our old age we have been carrying on that work.'[1] Swami Shivananda exemplified in his own life how intense inner spirituality and outer dynamism can be harmoniously blended. He stands as a shining personality among the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, in whom the 'Math' and 'Mission' aspects of the Order were harmonized in a very happy and potent fashion.

After Swami Vivekananda returned to India, Swami Shivananda went to Almora, since Swamiji wanted to start a centre there. From Almora Swami Shivananda went to Sri Lanka for preaching. Then from 1902 to 1909 Swami Shivananda established, through his hard work, a permanent centre at Varanasi, the abode of Lord Shiva.

When Swami Premananda became seriously ill in 1917, Swami Shivananda had to take over as the Manager of the Belur Math. Swami Premananda had a magnetic personality and motherly heart which drew to the Math a large number of devotees including many young people. At his death they felt utterly distressed and lost interest in the Math. But soon this vacuum was filled by Swami Shivananda. Referring to this development, he once remarked: 'All these years I had been out of close touch with people and their affairs. That is why I can't deal with them and speak to them in a way that might appeal to their hearts.'[2] Gradually, however, a current of compassion, hidden in his heart, unleashed itself and inundated the devotees with peace and joy. And when Swami Shivananda became the President of the Order, this stream took the shape of a mighty river.

The Ramakrishna Order, during the twelve years of the Presidentship of Swami Shivananda, recorded excellent growth, materially as well as spiritually. As the second President of the Order, he maintained the vibrant aura of spirituality existing in the Math, and at the same time consolidated the activities of the Mission by personally taking care of existing centres and opening new ones. Apart from centres in India, new centres were opened in Singapore, Europe, North America, and South America.[3] In India, Swami Shivananda either opened, or created the right connections for opening, new centres at Ootacamund (in the Nilgiri hills), Khar (Bombay), Nagpur, and Jamtara (Bihar). Moreover, his visits to existing centres like Varanasi, Kankhal, Nattarampalli, Madras, Deoghar, etc. were a source of great joy and inspiration to the local monks and devotees. His brief visits to other places laid the foundation for major work by the Order in the future. In 1924 he dedicated the Vivekananda Temple and the Brahmananda Temple at Belur Math.[4] And in 1926 he presided over the first convention of the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math. This was a momentous event for the Ramakrishna Order. In the late 1920s Swami Shivananda helped the famous French writer Romain Rolland with necessary information for writing his books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda — works which introduced these luminaries to a large section of Western people.

Swami Shivananda started initiating devotees from 1922 following a divine inspiration he received while at Dhaka. After that, numerous spiritual aspirants were blessed with initiation from him. Some also entered monastic

life and were fortunate to receive from him the vows of sannyāsa and brahmacharya. Swami Shivananda, however, always held Sri Ramakrishna to be the real guru, and himself only an instrument in His hands. Once at Varanasi he said: 'My son, I never have the idea that I am giving initiation. Thakur has been gracious enough not to give me the feeling that I am the guru. Shiva is the guru of the universe; in this age it is Sri Ramakrishna. He inspires the devotees' hearts and brings them here; and it is He again who speaks through me, sitting in my heart. Thakur is the soul of my soul.'[5]

Swami Shivananda firmly believed that profound spirituality and God-centredness should be the cornerstone of the Ramakrishna Order, and all selfless activities of the Mission should be directed to achieve the supreme goal of Self-realization. While he was at Belur Math, he once said, 'Know for certain that so long as this organization recognizes that God-realization is the prime purpose of life, and its members proceed towards that goal through the practice of renunciation, discrimination, meditation, etc., keeping the all-embracing life of Sri Ramakrishna as the ideal before them, the spiritual power of the organization will continue undiminished.'[6]

When the whole of India was astir over the struggle for freedom, many people wondered why the Ramakrishna Mission was not coming forward and giving active political leadership. Swami Shivananda, as President of the Order, set the matter to rest by this profound statement: '...we are working in our own way in accordance with our own ideal — an ideal formulated and left for us by the far-sighted sage Swami Vivekananda. Before his illumined vision was revealed the picture of the next thousand years — not merely of India but of the entire world. He saw everything clearly and chalked out a definite policy for us to follow.... The regeneration of India is absolutely certain.... Compared with her future achievement, her glorious past will pale into insignificance. Then you will realize why the Master and Swamiji came and how much they contributed to the well-being of India. What can the limited mind of man understand about the doings of those divine beings? Don't you see that they have awakened the national kundalini of India?'[7]

Such being the vision of Swami Shivananda, it is only natural that he would lay much stress on a contemplative life for successful execution of all work. He used to say: 'Meditation was important in the past; it is important in the present, and will continue to be so in the future. And talking about work —

work according to the ideals of Thakur and Swamiji can never be done without meditation. Work and worship should go together.'[8] 'Work without spirituality is sheer garbage.'[9] Once a monk, who was going to take up the editorship of *Prabuddha Bharata*, went to Swami Shivananda for his instructions. He was told: 'Carry on your spiritual practices properly. Then only will you be able to work properly.' That monk later reminisced: 'He [Swami Shivananda] told me nothing about which books I should read or how I should write for the magazine; he only said, "Carry on your spiritual practices well."'[10]

Belur Math, according to Swami Shivananda, is a powerhouse of spirituality;[11] and Sri Ramakrishna himself resides in the Math. As Swami Vivekananda himself stated, 'The Math represents the physical body of Sri Ramakrishna.'[12] So also, Swami Shivananda emphasized, 'Loyalty to the Sangha [Order] is loyalty to Thakur.'[13] And in keeping with this attitude, Swami Shivananda exhorted all monastic members of the Order to be particularly careful about the worship of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math. He himself was very particular about every detail of the worship, even during his old age and illness. He also wanted to see an intellectual atmosphere of study and discourses at the Math.

Above all, Swami Shivananda viewed the Order as a place of love — selfless, elevated, enlightening love. He said: 'Love is the only bond. He [Sri Ramakrishna] bound us all together by his cord of love.... Even today his Organization is being sustained by love alone. Here love is the only common cord by which all are kept united as an organized whole.'[14]

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Shashi Bhushan Chakravarty, born on 13 July 1863, was a young college student when he met Sri Ramakrishna. At their very first meeting the Master asked him, 'Do you believe in God with form or without form?' Shashi replied forthwith: 'I do not know whether God exists at all in the first instance. How can I answer your question?' Impressed by the frank response, Sri Ramakrishna spoke to him about spiritual life with great affection, and from the fullness of his experience. This forged a strong bond between them, and Shashi immediately accepted Sri Ramakrishna as his guru, surrendering his whole life to him. Sri Ramakrishna identified Shashi as one of the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Shashi's faith in Sri Ramakrishna's words was phenomenal. Once Sri Ramakrishna expressed his desire to eat a jamrul fruit, which was then not in season. But Shashi felt that since the words had been uttered by his guru, the fruit must be available somewhere. So he began to search everywhere. After several days, he found the fruit in a far-off village. When Sri Ramakrishna got the fruit he was immensely pleased and perhaps felt that with his steadfast faith and determination Shashi would find God too.

Shashi served Sri Ramakrishna during his last illness, sacrificing everything for him. In fact, his devotion to Sri Ramakrishna was so great that after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, while taking the formal vow of sannyāsa, Swami Vivekananda felt that Shashi was the right person to be given the name 'Ramakrishnananda'.

Ramakrishnananda worshipped the relics of Sri Ramakrishna at the Baranagore monastery with characteristic zeal and devotion, feeling the Master's living presence. And he would not leave the monastery as a wandering monk like the other young monks often did. He also took care of the other monks as a mother would care for her children. This was his spiritual practice by which he achieved his spiritual fulfilment. His total surrender was reflected in his quick response to the call of Swami Vivekananda in 1897 to go to South India for preaching.

Ramakrishnananda came to Madras to start a monastery there and preach Vedanta and the universal message of Sri Ramakrishna in and around the city. By his austere life, devoted service, immense scholarship, and great forbearance, he succeeded in establishing a permanent centre there which, in course of time, was to play the dominant role in spreading the message all over South India. He visited different places in South India, preaching and inspiring people through his saintly personality. Through his influence a number of centres came into existence in South India.

But the hardships that he had to undergo in Madras told on his health and he left his mortal body on 21 August 1911. On hearing the sad news at Puri, the grief-stricken Swami Brahmananda exclaimed: 'The guardian angel of the South has passed away. The southern side is, as it were, covered with darkness.'

Ramakrishnananda's life of 14 years in Madras (1897-1911) marked the beginning of a great epoch in spreading the Ramakrishna Movement in South

India, and he was rightly called 'Sri Ramakrishna's Apostle to the South'. A brief account of his work in the South is given below.

Swami Ramakrishnananda had a loving and compassionate heart despite his stern exterior. At his instance Ramaswamy and Ramanujachariar, the cousins who had met Swami Vivekananda earlier and felt an urge to extend a helping hand to Ramakrishnananda, started a free boarding-house for poor students. This later developed into a huge residential institution providing education, food, and other facilities free of cost to poor students. Following this, a number of educational institutions came into existence in Madras city. Thus Ramakrishnananda was the initial spirit behind all educational activities that are going on in Madras under the Ramakrishna Mission.

His activities were not confined to Madras city only. On the invitation of the Vedanta Society of Ulsoor, Bangalore, the Swami went there on 19 July 1903 and was given a rousing reception. He stayed there for a fortnight, delivered several lectures, and gave a number of interviews, thereby attracting large numbers of devotees. Interest was soon created in starting a permanent centre in Bangalore, and he even went from door to door collecting money to start it. Finally a centre at Bangalore was formally opened by Swami Brahmananda on 20 January 1909.

Swami Ramakrishnananda also visited Mysore in October 1903 where he delivered lectures at Rangachari Hall and an address in Sanskrit to the pundits at the Sanskrit College. Thus he sowed the seed for the emergence of an important centre in Mysore, fulfilling the prophecy of Swami Vivekananda, 'Mysore in time will be a great stronghold.'

His visit to Trivandrum was also very successful. There he attracted a circle of devotees who established a Vedanta Society for continuing the work initiated by the Swami. Later a permanent centre of the Ramakrishna Order was started in 1924 by Swami Nirmalananda, who also played an important role in founding a number of other centres in Kerala, a state which has contributed quite a number of great swamis to the Order.

Ramakrishnananda's visits to Rangoon and Bombay were equally fruitful in establishing permanent centres there in course of time. When we reflect on the contribution of Swami Ramakrishnananda to the Ramakrishna Order, the first thing that impresses us is his indefatigable service to Sri Ramakrishna, both during his illness at Cossipore and also at the Baranagore monastery

through the worship of the Master's relics. Later this worship of Sri Ramakrishna, in some form or other, became a permanent feature in almost every centre of the Order, forming the centre of all its activities, thus making devotion to Sri Ramakrishna the rallying point for all the members of the Order. Ramakrishnananda's contribution to the ritualistic aspect of the Order cannot be over-emphasized when we consider ritualism as an integral part of religion, bereft of which religion becomes dry speculation and does not touch the emotional aspect of man. By firmly establishing the worship of Sri Ramakrishna as the centre of the Mission's life and activity, he contributed immensely to the solidarity of the Order. Yet ritualism shorn of its spiritual background is sterile and meaningless. Ramakrishnananda, following Sri Ramakrishna, infused spirit into ritualism, thus creating the simple and unostentatious rituals followed in all our centres.

Another important contribution that cannot be overlooked was his commitment to take care of the monastery and its inmates during its inception at Baranagore. Sri Ramakrishna sowed the seed of the monastery, Vivekananda transplanted the seedling to Baranagore, and Ramakrishnananda nourished it with all his motherly care. And this he did at great personal sacrifice.

Yet another contribution to the Order was, of course, his untiring work in South India in spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna and thus providing a fertile ground for the emergence of a number of centres of our Order as well as some private centres. Though his success may not have been spectacular, yet it was enduring. Thus his contribution to the Organization is marked both by its extensity and intensity.

Swami Abhedananda

When we study Indian philosophy, we find Swami Abhedananda to be one of the modern thinkers on philosophy. He carved for himself a place in the field of modern Indian philosophy by his scholarly interpretation of Vedanta, making it consonant with modern science and acceptable to the modern mind — following the footsteps of Swami Vivekananda. But he was not a mere philosopher; he was also a yogi. When, as Kaliprasad (his pre-monastic name), he met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time at Dakshineswar, the Master remarked: 'You were a great yogi in your previous birth. This is your last birth. I shall

initiate you into the mysteries of yoga practices.' So saying, the Master lovingly called him to his side and wrote a mantra on his tongue, touching his chest. The divine touch of the Master brought about a wonderful transformation in Kali's mind, making him plunge into deep meditation. Kali then began to practise spiritual disciplines with great enthusiasm under the loving guidance of the Master, and through his grace Kali was blessed with many mystic experiences.

Kaliprasad was born on 2 October 1866 in Calcutta. Even during his boyhood he began to study Sanskrit, and as he grew up he was drawn to the study of philosophy, both Eastern and Western.

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Kali renounced the world and joined the monastery at Baranagore. He was named Abhedananda when he formally took sannyāsa along with the other brother disciples. In the Baranagore Math he used to shut himself up in a room to practise intense spiritual disciplines and study Vedanta, thereby earning the nickname 'Kali Tapasvi'. During this period he composed beautiful Sanskrit hymns on Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. The latter blessed him, after listening to them, saying, 'May the Goddess of learning ever dwell on your tongue'. This blessing was fulfilled later when he left for the West in 1896, responding to the call of Swami Vivekananda who was then in London.

Now a new phase in Abhedananda's life started, and he was amply prepared for this life with his spiritual background and prodigious scholarship. Entrusting his work of preaching Vedanta in the West to Abhedananda, Swami Vivekananda returned to India. Abhedananda spent almost a quarter of a century in the West teaching Vedanta and spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna. He extensively toured many Western countries, especially the USA, giving speeches on various subjects besides Vedanta, holding discussions with prominent intellectuals and philosophers like William James, dispelling misconceptions about Indian culture and religion, and inspiring many to accept Vedanta as their way of life. He also started some Vedanta centres in America.

After returning to Calcutta in 1923, he started his own centre of Vedanta to carry out his plans and methods. A Bengali monthly called *Vishwavani* was also started to facilitate his activities. His last public activity was his Presidential address at the Parliament of Religions held at the Town Hall, Calcutta, on the occasion of the birth centenary celebration of Sri Ramakrishna.

Abhedananda left his mortal body on 8 September 1939. He was the last sannyāsin disciple of Sri Ramakrishna to leave this world. In accordance with his last wish, his body was cremated in Cossipore, near the spot where his Master's body had been consigned to the flames in 1886.

Towards the end of his life Abhedananda told his disciples: 'Tapasyā or austerity enhances will-power. Have self-confidence. Have faith in yourself. Think: I am a child of immortal bliss. The infinite power is playing within me. If you have this conviction, you will conquer the world.'[15]

Swami Abhedananda has left behind him a vast amount of invaluable literature on a variety of subjects such as psychology, history, religion, philosophy, etc., all charged with knowledge and insight, apart from his writings on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. His collected works, containing his speeches and writings, run into eleven large volumes. The monthly magazine started by him is still being published. His literary contribution to the Ramakrishna Movement can be judged by the impact that it has made on the minds of the elite, as a result of which he is included among the contemporary Indian philosophers.

His hymns on Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother are so popular that they are regularly sung in almost all the branches of our Order, and his meditation-hymn on Sri Ramakrishna is included in the daily worship of Sri Ramakrishna.

Speaking about his literary contribution, Swami Gambhirananda writes: 'He was not only a powerful speaker, but also a prolific writer. If his spoken words moulded the lives of hundreds of persons, his printed thoughts influenced a wider circle of people in different countries. His writings contain deep philosophy with a great wealth of information couched in a very popular style. As such, they have been of immense help in broadcasting the philosophical and spiritual ideas of India. As a matter of fact, they constitute a valuable legacy to the spiritually inclined souls all the world over.'[16]

Apart from his literary contribution, his contributions as a preacher to the spread of the Ramakrishna Movement cannot be over-estimated. In the West he was recognized as a noted preacher, philosopher, and writer. Undaunted by the onslaughts of Christian missionaries, Swami Abhedananda carried on his work with tremendous vigour and enthusiasm. 'His profundity of scholarship, incisive intellectual powers, oratorical talent and his charming personality

made him so popular that in New York itself, in the Mott Memorial Hall, he had to deliver ninety lectures to satisfy public demand.'[17]

And when he returned to India in 1906, he was accorded a hero's welcome, and encomiums were heaped on him as a great successor to Swami Vivekananda. He continued Swamiji's work of spreading the message of Vedanta with signal success, and this contributed immensely in laying the foundation of the Ramakrishna Movement in the West, particularly in the USA.

Swami Adbhutananda

After studying the life and achievements of an intellectual giant, Swami Abhedananda, we now come to another personality who was completely devoid of book-learning, not even having learned to read and write, and strangely enough, who was the disciple of the same guru. Sri Ramakrishna once tried to teach him the alphabets and failed, but then told him, 'The Vedas and Vedanta will come out of your mouth.' This extraordinary personality was Swami Adbhutananda, or Latu Maharaj as he was called by his brother disciples and devotees.

Latu Maharaj was a shining example of how the grace of a divine personality like Sri Ramakrishna can convert a simple, poor, and unlettered boy, belonging to the working class, into a spiritual giant. This miracle of Sri Ramakrishna prompted Swami Vivekananda to give Latu the name Adbhutananda (the bliss of the marvellous).

Latu came from a remote village called Chapra in Bihar. He lost his parents when he was five and was looked after by his uncle. Dire poverty forced him to come to Calcutta and work as a servant in the house of Ramchandra Datta, who, fortunately, was a close devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Through his master, Ramchandra Datta, Latu came in contact with his spiritual master, Sri Ramakrishna, who, divining his spiritual potential, accepted him as his disciple.

Latu stayed with Sri Ramakrishna, rendered him personal service and, along with it, practised spiritual disciplines under his careful guidance. One day at Dakshineswar Latu was sleeping in the evening after working hard all day. Observing this, the Master rebuked him: 'What! You are sleeping at this hour instead of meditating? You should meditate so deeply that the night passes unnoticed. Instead, your eyelids are heavy with sleep at this auspicious time. Did you come here only to sleep?' That was enough for Latu to make a resolve

not to sleep at night at all in the future. He used to spend the whole night in meditation, sleeping only for a short while during the day.

But Sri Ramakrishna also took care of him very lovingly. Once Latu was meditating on the bank of the Ganga when the ebb tide came. Latu was completely oblivious of his surroundings. Seeing this, Sri Ramakrishna immediately came, roused him from meditation, and took him to safety. On another occasion, on a hot summer day, Latu was in deep meditation in a Shiva temple. Sri Ramakrishna came and started fanning him on seeing him perspiring. Another day Sri Ramakrishna went in search of Latu's shoes, which were missing. These acts of love, along with the profound spirituality of Sri Ramakrishna, impelled Latu to completely surrender himself at the feet of the Master. Service to the guru was his main *sādhanā*.

After the passing away of the Master, Latu took monastic vows like his brother disciples and became Swami Adbhutananda.

Adbhutananda's spiritual practices continued unabated, sometimes at the Math or at Balaram's house or on the bank of the Ganga or even at the Basumati press office among the press workers. He later stayed at the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service at Varanasi and spent his time in intense *sādhanā*. Observing his intense spiritual disciplines and his spiritual achievements, Swami Vivekananda once remarked: 'Coming from such surroundings Latu approached Sri Ramakrishna unlettered, and unlike others who were all educated and refined, Latu has no other resort except the one method of japa and meditation to follow and uplift himself from the bottom to the heights of great spiritual wealth. This shows the great power hidden inside Latu and the Master's extraordinary grace on him.'

Swami Adbhutananda breathed his last in Varanasi while in a state of deep meditation. As was his life wonderful, so was his death, thus completely substantiating his name 'Adbhutananda'.

We generally estimate the contribution of a person by observing his external achievements. But the contributions of some people are so subtle that they go unnoticed on superficial observation. Swami Adbhutananda belongs to the latter category. He was not actively involved in the work of the Ramakrishna Mission, but his life itself was a great contribution to the organization. His utterly simple and austere life has become a role model to be emulated by the members of our Order, for simplicity is the hallmark of

monastic life. He showed in his exemplary life that complete surrender to Sri Ramakrishna and taking refuge in him would bring everything one needs in spiritual life. This instilled great faith in the minds of the monastic members and devotees. His life is an ideal and a great source of inspiration for sincere spiritual aspirants of our Order.

Though he did not participate in the day-to-day activities of the Order, he had great regard for the organization and would inspire many devotees to go to Belur Math, thereby benefiting spiritually.

Though he was illiterate and had no book-learning, he had a deep understanding of the scriptures. Many educated people would come to him and have long discussions on abstruse philosophical questions. The great scholar Pundit Vishnu Tarkaratna says of Latu Maharaj: 'Hearing this unlettered Latu Maharaj explaining in a simple way the reality of God, we feel blessed that we too can understand the great life of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and his spiritual experiences. Latu Maharaj's words were not parrot-like from book-learning, but of inner realization born out of his guru's grace and his own austerities. Hence people found solace and satisfaction in life after hearing him, and many educated people would come and sit at his feet for hours to listen to his words. His deep realizations and his extraordinary capacity to awaken and inspire others is a wonder to behold and true to his name, a life lived fully.'

Thus through his exemplary life he attracted many people towards Sri Ramakrishna, thereby contributing immensely to the Ramakrishna Movement. His life and teachings are published in Bengali, English, and other languages, and they are a great source of inspiration to many spiritual seekers. Thus his simple and austere life of contemplation and his equally simple teachings with deep spiritual and philosophical implications are a great asset to the Ramakrishna Order. Buildings may collapse, institutions may stop functioning, but these teachings will remain as a perennial source of inspiration and guidance, contributing immensely to the spiritual tradition of the organization.

Swami Advaitananda

Swami Advaitananda was the only monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who was elder to him in age. The intense agony of depression on the passing

away of his wife brought him to Sri Ramakrishna, whose healing touch converted him into a great spiritual aspirant, and ultimately a realized soul.

His pre-monastic name was Gopal Chandra Ghosh. Because of his advanced age and also to distinguish him from another Gopal who was younger, he was called Budo Gopal (elder Gopal). Since he had no family commitments, he stayed with Sri Ramakrishna and served him with unswerving devotion.

It was his desire to take initiation from Sri Ramakrishna, but he hesitated to ask him. Once, finding the Master strolling alone in the temple garden of Dakshineswar, Gopal thought that it would be an appropriate time to approach him for initiation. He went and knelt down before the Master, and holding his feet, started crying. The Master lifted him up holding his arms. Gopal was still crying profusely. What transpired between them is not known, but after that Gopal started repeating God's name every evening in front of the Krishna temple.

Once Gopal wanted to distribute ochre clothes and rosaries to some monks. When he mentioned this to Sri Ramakrishna, the Master said: 'You won't find better monks than these young boys here. You may give your clothes and rosaries to them.' Gopal brought a bundle of saffron clothes and placed them before the Master, who distributed them among his young disciples. Thus, in a way, Gopal became instrumental in sowing the seed of the future Ramakrishna Order.

After the passing away of the Master, Gopal took to monastic life and became Advaitananda. He stayed at the Baranagore monastery for some time and then left for Varanasi where he practised austerities for about five years, living in a small room and procuring his food by begging.

Later he came to Belur Math and took upon himself the work of levelling the ground for the construction of the new monastery. Afterwards he took the responsibility of maintaining the garden and grew vegetables for the kitchen. Swami Adbhutananda said: 'Without Gopalda the monks of Belur Math would not have had vegetables along with their rice. He worked so hard to produce various kinds of vegetables in the monastery garden.'

Till almost the end of his life Advaitananda maintained fairly good health, except for stomach trouble now and then. While passing away also he had no serious ailment. He only suffered from fever. Till the end he was fully conscious and was chanting the name of Sri Ramakrishna. His face looked beautiful. He passed away smoothly from one state of being to another. He had come to the

Master in a state of mental depression. From there he passed to the state of divine life, and now to the state of eternal life.

It is difficult to estimate the contributions of Swami Advaitananda in concrete terms. But he lived an exemplary life for the future generations of monks to follow. He was very punctual, methodical in work, very clean and tidy, and truthful to the letter. He always kept things in their proper places and would never misplace them. All his belongings (they were very few, of course) were kept in an orderly manner. He lived a very simple life devoted to spiritual contemplation. His life was a role model for young novitiates in the formative period of their monastic life.

He started his spiritual life when he was quite advanced in age. He came from an ordinary merchant community, probably without much religious background. By the grace of the Master and by his own strenuous efforts he was transformed into a great spiritual personality instilling hope, especially in the elders. He will ever be remembered in the circle of monastics as well as devotees of the Order.

Swami Vijnanananda

Now we come to another unique personality whose life was full of mystical visions and who lived like a true *avadhūta*, being unconventional in his conduct. Swami Vijnanananda's pre-monastic name was Hariprasanna Chattopadhyaya. He was born on 28 October 1868 in a respectable family of Belgharia, Calcutta. When he met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar in 1883 he was 15 years old. Seeing the spiritual potential of the boy, the Master treated him with great love and kindness and gave him many spiritual instructions. The Master's unbounded love and his unparalleled spiritual wisdom captivated Hariprasanna. He spent many hours with the Master that day.

When Hariprasanna returned home late at night, his mother was annoyed and said, 'So you have been to that mad brahmin who has deranged the brains of no less than three-hundred and fifty young men?' In later days Vijnanananda, referring to the above incident, would remark: 'Derangement of brain indeed! The brain is still deranged. Had I not been caught in the influence of that mad man, who knows where I should have been now — wallowing in the welter of the world?'

Once the Master asked Hariprasanna to stay at Dakshineswar overnight, and allowed him to sleep in his own room — a rare privilege reserved only for the chosen few. While Hariprasanna was lying on his bed, Sri Ramakrishna very tenderly spoke to him about spiritual life. After some time the Master started moving round his bed, clapping and muttering something indistinct. This made Hariprasanna wonder whether Sri Ramakrishna was really mad! But later he found that the Master had transmitted spiritual power to him through that strange behaviour. Another day the Master, under the pretext of wrestling with Hariprasanna, transmitted spiritual power to him — though the Master himself was defeated in the game.

After studying civil engineering at Pune, Hariprasanna joined Government service, and rose in the course of a few years to the position of a District Engineer. He joined the brotherhood of monks in 1896 at Alambazar after resigning from the job, and became Swami Vijnanananda.

He visited many places as a wandering monk and practised intense spiritual disciplines at solitary places. Later he stayed at Allahabad for some time as the guest of a doctor friend. There was a group of young devotees of Sri Ramakrishna who were getting together regularly and spending their time in spiritual discussion and practices. They heard that Vijnanananda was at Allahabad, and one day they came and earnestly requested him to stay at Allahabad as their spiritual guide. After visiting their place, i.e. the Brahmavadin club, he decided to stay there for a while. But he continued to live there for a number of years, spending his time in intense austerities, study, and meditation. Later he established a permanent centre of the Ramakrishna Math in the city and spent the rest of his life there as a unique spiritual force. It is said that he practised severe austerities — fifteen hours a day for ten years — while at the Brahmavadin club. Referring to his spiritual attainments, Swami Brahmananda once remarked: 'It is very difficult to know him. He always keeps himself hidden. But he is a knower of Brahman. He has known the Self and is thus satisfied.' Though he himself was a great spiritual teacher, Brahmananda used to send those boys who had special spiritual aptitude to Allahabad to grow under the guidance of Swami Vijnanananda.

In 1937 Swami Vijnanananda became the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and began to initiate devotees and guide them spiritually.

Earlier he had been reluctant to initiate people even though he was pre-eminently qualified to be a guru. But now he came out of his spiritual seclusion and poured out his spiritual power through initiation and instruction.

His last important work was the consecration of Sri Ramakrishna's temple at Belur Math in 1938, thus fulfilling the dream of Swami Vivekananda. He attained mahāsamādhi in Allahabad on 25 April 1938.

Swami Vijnanananda had been an expert civil engineer. Later he became a spiritual engineer, surveying the landscape of the inner regions of the personality and building spiritual edifices within himself and helping others to do so by giving them blue-prints of spiritual architecture. But he continued to contribute his expertise as a civil engineer by supervising the building constructions at Belur Math. During those days he worked very hard to fulfil the expectations of Swami Vivekananda, who was eager to see the construction completed as quickly as possible.

Later he was always consulted regarding the construction of the Ramakrishna Mission's hospitals or temples in other places. In 1909 he went to Varanasi to supervise the construction of the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service.

During the last phase of his life he travelled extensively, visiting many centres of the Ramakrishna Order, including those in Colombo and Rangoon. Everywhere his presence brought spiritual awakening to innumerable persons. He gave out his spiritual treasures unstintingly to eager seekers of Truth, thus contributing to the spread of the Ramakrishna Movement. The credit of establishing a centre in Allahabad goes to him.

He combined in his life intense spiritual discipline, intellectual study, a simple and unostentatious demeanour, and hard work, along with missionary zeal. This type of life is best suited to members of a monastic Order. Thus his life can be a role model for spiritual aspirants in the Mission.

Yet another contribution was his unconventional way of life. This may apparently go contrary to the spirit of organization, for in any organization certain conventions are bound to be formed, and living in conformity with them becomes inevitable. But too much emphasis on conventions kills the spirit and becomes an impediment to spiritual progress. Moreover, sometimes people adhere to them so strongly that they even disregard moral principles. Erich Fromm humorously remarks: 'Conventions are customs which are more

practised than preached; morals are customs which are more preached than practised. They are duties which we require of our neighbours.'[18] Swami Vijnanananda's life particularly stands as a warning for us to be careful not to fall victim to the conventions which are unavoidable in an organization.

Swami Akhandananda

Swami Akhandananda was the embodiment of service to humanity as the living image of God. He exemplified fully in his life the ideal of Rantideva expressed in the following couplet:

नत्वहं कामये राज्यं न स्वर्गं न पुनर्भवम् ।
कामये दुःखतप्तानां प्राणिनामार्ति नाशनम् ।।

'I do not covet an earthly kingdom or heaven or even salvation. The only thing I desire is the removal of the miseries of the afflicted.'

Gangadhar Ghatak, as he was called in his pre-monastic days, was born on 30 September 1864 in Calcutta. From his boyhood he had a religious temperament and was very orthodox in his habits. But this extreme orthodoxy, which once prompted Sri Ramakrishna to call him 'oldish', gave way to true spirituality through his contact with the Master.

When Gangadhar first saw Sri Ramakrishna in Dinanath Basu's house, he was 13 years old, and his spiritual inclinations deepened after seeing him in samādhi there. He started going to a cremation ground to meditate, and he spurned all worldly associations to follow the spiritual path undisturbed. Seeing his indifference to worldly life, his mother tried to arrange his marriage. But Gangadhar learned of her intention and sarcastically said: 'Mother, arrange my marriage quickly and bring another "mother" home. She will help you in cooking and other household chores.' Knowing her son's pure nature she set aside her plans to get him married.

The earlier influence of Sri Ramakrishna on him brought him eventually to the Master and to accept him as his guru. Sri Ramakrishna initiated him by writing something on his tongue, and guided him, along with the other disciples, on the path of spiritual discipline suited to his temperament. Once the Master took Gangadhar into the Kali temple and, pointing to Lord Shiva lying prostrate at Mother Kali's feet, said to him, 'Look here, see the living

Shiva!' Gangadhar could see that Shiva was conscious and breathing, and he was astonished!

But seeing the Lord outside was not enough. He was to be experienced within as one's own Self. On another occasion at Dakshineswar Gangadhar found the Master in samādhi. On coming down from that plane, the Master told him: 'One's own Chosen Deity and the Atman are identical. The vision of the Chosen Deity is equal to Self-knowledge.'

During his last illness the Master once heard one of his attendants saying 'I know' regarding something. The Master corrected him, saying: 'What do you say? You know? Never say that. Say, "As long as I live, so long do I learn."' Gangadhar was present at that time. The Master's words left a profound impression on his mind. Perhaps it was this that made him travel far and wide after the passing away of the Master, gaining thereby immense knowledge and rich experience. In his later days he would narrate his adventures to his attendants and devotees, making them listen to him with rapt attention. The account of Akhandananda's wanderings in the Himalayas and in Tibet, without any money and belongings and depending solely on the Master's protection, with his thrilling experiences and unforeseen difficulties, makes absorbing reading.

He did not just wander out of curiosity to see different interesting places. All the time he was gaining higher spiritual experiences through his intense spiritual practices and by opening himself to others. He was expanding his heart through his loving response to different situations. His heart would bleed whenever he saw any kind of misery. Once he came across a brahmin who had been starving while fulfilling a vow to chant the Gāyatrī mantra continually. Akhandananda immediately begged food from some pilgrims and gave it to the brahmin.

While he was in Rajasthan he was deeply pained to see the appalling miseries of the masses and the callousness of some of the kings and landlords who were living in luxury. He tried to inspire the kings to alleviate the miseries of the masses. He induced the Maharaja of Khetri to make an annual grant of Rs. 5,000 for the promotion of education in his territory, while he himself went from door-to-door to campaign for the education of the children.

Akhandananda was the one who responded the most to Swamiji's call to serve the poor as God. In 1899 Murshidabad was under the grip of a

severe famine. He happened to be passing through that area and there he met a Muslim girl of about fourteen, clad in dirty rags and weeping. Her only earthen pot had broken for which she was sure to get a beating from her mother. Akhandananda had only four annas in his pocket. He purchased a new pot and some puffed rice for her. When the shopkeeper was giving him his balance of three annas, he saw a dozen children around him crying for food. He spent the balance in buying more puffed rice for them. This was the genesis of the orphanage he started at the village of Sargachi in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal.

He loved to work quietly and unobserved among the common people. This trait of his kept him in Sargachi village, in spite of his indifferent health and even after he became the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1934. But during his last illness he was brought to Calcutta, and he passed away at Belur Math on 7 February 1937. Thus ended a life of intense activity and service based on spiritual realization. His life was a burning example of his own remarkable statement: 'Distribute yourself among others and bring other souls within yourself. You will see how much joy you will get from it. On the other hand, if you are always busy with yourself, you will be entangled within yourself. You will kill your Self and you will die.'

According to Swami Vivekananda, worship of God should not be confined to the shrine room, but is to be extended to the whole of humanity. So worship of God in man — not with flowers, sandal paste, etc., but by fulfilling his physical, psychological, and social needs — has become a very important aspect of the Mission. Through his own example Swami Akhandananda laid a firm foundation for the service activities of the Mission. Conducting relief work wherever and whenever there is any natural calamity, providing medical and educational services to the poor, and carrying on village and tribal welfare programmes — all these activities of the Mission bear witness to the great heart of Swami Akhandananda.

His extensive travels in the Himalayas, Tibet, and north-western India have also contributed to the organization by instilling a spirit of adventure and self-sacrifice in its members.

As the President of the organization Swami Akhandananda was called upon to initiate disciples, and during the last three years he blessed many earnest aspirants with initiation.

Swami Yogananda

One day a young man came to pluck flowers from the beautiful garden of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna happened to be there. Mistaking him for a gardener, the young man asked for some flowers. The divine gardener obeyed, and after handing over the flowers, quietly went away. A few days later when the young man went to meet Sri Ramakrishna, after reading about him in the periodicals of the Brahmo Samaj, he was surprised to find that Sri Ramakrishna was none other than the gardener whom he had met earlier. In course of time this 'gardener' was to tend him as a 'flowering plant'. The Master told him that day: 'You have some auspicious signs which indicate your great spiritual potential. Please come and see me off and on.'

This young man, Yogindranath Roy Chowdhury, or Yogin for short, was born on 30 March 1861. He soon started frequenting Sri Ramakrishna through whose contact a strong yearning for God was kindled in his heart. Seeing his strong spiritual inclination his parents arranged for his marriage. And to console his grieving mother he married, but kept himself aloof from his wife, not having any marital relationship with her. By the grace of the Master he was able to overcome the sexual impulse totally. Swami Vivekananda once remarked, 'If anyone among us has completely overcome lust, it is Yogin.'

Yogin was soft and shy by nature, and was somewhat of a 'doubting Thomas'. Once he happened to spend a night at Dakshineswar and was sleeping in the Master's room. Finding the Master absent from the room at midnight, he suspected that he might have gone to the room of his wife, who was staying at the Nahabat. Soon, however, he heard the Master coming from the direction of the Panchavati and he was filled with remorse. There were one or two other occasions when he doubted the Master, but Sri Ramakrishna always reassured him and trained him with motherly care.

Once Yogin was travelling in a boat when some other passengers, who were critical of Sri Ramakrishna, were making derogatory remarks about him. Yogin, because of his soft nature, did not raise any objection, even though he felt hurt at heart. When the Master heard about the incident from him, he rebuked him saying: 'A disciple should never hear criticisms hurled against his guru. If he cannot protest, he should leave the spot forthwith.' On another occasion Yogin went to purchase a pan from the market and bought one that

was defective, being cheated by the shopkeeper. This also called for a sharp rebuke from the Master: 'A man may aspire to be religious, but that is no reason why he should be a fool.'

Thus the Master trained him in various ways to overcome his soft nature. In later years, after he had become Swami Yogananda, he questioned Swami Vivekananda when the latter was making plans to start the Ramakrishna Mission for social activities, arguing that it was not in consonance with Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Swami Yogananda, however, changed when he realized that Swamiji's plan for social activities was in accordance with the inner guidance he had received from Sri Ramakrishna; and when he accepted the ideas of Swamiji, he cooperated with him and even became the Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order.

But his life was short. Sri Ramakrishna took him away on 28 March 1899, leaving a great void. Swami Vivekananda was stricken with grief at this and said, 'This is the beginning of the end.' Incidentally, Swami Yogananda was the first among the monastic disciples of the Master to pass away. The Holy Mother also said: 'It is like a brick falling out of the wall of a building. It is an evil omen.'

Just before Yogananda's death, Shivananda had asked him, 'Yogin, do you remember the Master?' Yogananda replied, 'Yes, I remember the Master more — even more — much more.'

Outwardly, Yogananda's life was uneventful, and it was not easy to fathom the depth of his personality with all its spiritual dimensions which could be judged only by his close associates. One of the young members of the Math at that time wrote with regard to him, 'He was such a great saint that it fills one with awe to belong, even as the youngest member, to the Order that contained him.' Thus his very presence itself was a great contribution to the Order, creating strong spiritual vibrations under which many could sustain themselves in the monastic Order. He inspired and guided many youngsters who joined the Order at its inception.

One of the most important things that Yogananda did which helped in spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna was the arrangement of the birth anniversary festival of Sri Ramakrishna on a large scale at Dakshineswar from 1895 to 1897. In 1898, he organized a similar celebration at Daw's temple complex at Belur. At that time Sri Ramakrishna was not so widely known, but

Yogananda's magnetic personality attracted many young volunteers from Ahiritola, Calcutta, and the celebrations were observed with great enthusiasm. In 1897, when Swami Vivekananda returned from the West, Yogananda took an active part in organizing the reception for Swamiji that created a sensation all over Calcutta.

When we consider Yogananda's contribution to the Order, it behoves us not to overlook his devoted service to the Holy Mother, who was considered the Sangha Janani (the Mother of the Order). He was one of the first monks who discovered Holy Mother's extraordinary spiritual greatness hidden under her simple manners. The Holy Mother once said: 'Yogin and Sharat belong to my inner circle. None loved me as did Yogin. If anybody would give him any money, he would save it, saying, "Mother will use it for her pilgrimage."'

Swami Niranjanananda

Another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who was one of the first to recognize the divinity of the Holy Mother was Swami Niranjanananda. His pre-monastic name was Nitya Niranjan Ghosh, and he was born in 1862 at Rajarhat, Vishnupur. While he was studying in Calcutta, he joined a group of spiritualists and was made a medium for contacting spirits. Hearing about Sri Ramakrishna, Niranjan went to him with the purpose of making him a suitable medium, but the process was reversed, and Niranjan himself became a medium of a higher order for Sri Ramakrishna to transmit spiritual power to humanity. The Master jokingly told Niranjan: 'Now, my boy, another Ghost — the Holy Ghost — is upon you. However much you try, you will not be able to dismiss Him.'

Sri Ramakrishna's love compelled Niranjan to visit him again. Seeing him, the Master was overwhelmed with emotion and in a choked voice said: 'Oh, my boy, the days are flitting away. When will you realize God? This life will be in vain if you do not realize Him. When will you devote your mind wholly to God? Oh! How anxious I am for you!' Niranjan was speechless when he heard these words, and was very much moved by the Master's great love and concern for him.

Niranjan immediately severed his connection with the spiritualists and plunged himself into spiritual practices under the guidance of Sri Ramakrishna.

One day the Master wrote a mantra on Niranjan's tongue. The power of that mantra kept Niranjan fully awake for three days and nights. It vibrated throughout his body, bringing wonderful spiritual visions and completely transforming him. When the Master was suffering from cancer during his last days, Niranjan served him with complete dedication and also guarded him from the touch of impure people.

After the Master's demise Niranjan renounced the world and became Swami Niranjanananda. He stayed at the Baranagore monastery for some time doing intense spiritual practices, and then left for several places of pilgrimage to continue his spiritual disciplines.

When Swami Vivekananda returned from the West in 1897, Niranjanananda went to Colombo to receive him and accompanied him to Almora. He took great care of Swamiji during his illness at Belur Math and acted as his door-keeper just as he had done for Sri Ramakrishna. Niranjanananda's devotion to Holy Mother was extraordinary. Vivekananda used to say: 'Niranjan has a militant disposition, but he has great devotion for Mother. So I can easily put up with all his vagaries.'

Because of his intense austerities his health broke down. Towards the end of his life he went to Hardwar after taking leave of Holy Mother. There, in a rented house, he spent his time in intense *sādhanā* in spite of his illness, refusing any assistance from others. When his attendant tried to serve him, Niranjanananda declined his help, saying, 'Won't you allow me to die in peace?' He passed away in samādhi on 9 May 1904.

When we make an attempt to estimate Swami Niranjanananda's contribution to the Ramakrishna Movement, the thing that strikes us most is his magnetic personality coupled with a spiritual aura that inspired many young men to take up the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. Wherever he went he carried the message of Sri Ramakrishna and inspired people to follow him. His personality was such that by coming in contact with him people would understand the glory of Sri Ramakrishna.

When Niranjanananda was in Varanasi he encouraged a group of young men to take up spiritual life and to practise the ideal of service. In 1899 this group observed Sri Ramakrishna's birthday under his guidance. The same group later founded the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, and some of them received their monastic vows directly from Vivekananda.

When Niranjanananda was in Raipur, an army officer named Suraj Rao met him and was greatly inspired. Suraj later resigned from his position and became a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. After taking sannyāsa from him he became Swami Nischayananda. Swami Nischayananda, along with Swami Kalyanananda, another disciple of Swami Vivekananda, established the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama at Kankhal, and they are the guiding ideals of the centre even now, long after their passing away.

Another contribution was his recognition of the divinity of Holy Mother and his intense devotion to her. It was Niranjanananda who drew the attention of other monastic members towards Holy Mother, and the credit of making Girish Chandra Ghosh understand the greatness of Holy Mother should also go to him. It was partly as a result of Niranjanananda's active preaching that many devotees came to recognize the spiritual greatness of Holy Mother.

Swami Trigunatitananda

The depression brought about by the loss of a gold watch led the young Sarada Prasanna to Dakshineswar, seeking mental relief. At that time he was studying in the Metropolitan Institute of Shyampukur where Mahendranath Gupta, or 'M', was the headmaster. It was 'M' who took the boy to Sri Ramakrishna. Sarada was greatly attracted by the saint of Dakshineswar and started going to him frequently. Thus the loss of a gold watch brought him to a truly golden personality.

Sarada was born in an aristocratic family of 24-Parganas on 30 January 1865. From his boyhood he showed a rare religious disposition and found delight in worship and spiritual practices. His contact with the Master further stimulated his religious spirit. Deeply impressed by his religious temperament, the Master started training him, and made him undergo many spiritual disciplines.

After the passing away of the Master, Sarada joined the monastery at Baranagore, defying all attempts by his parents to keep him at home. He became Swami Trigunatitananda after the formal vow of sannyāsa.

The Swami had a strong constitution and was not afraid of anything. During his itinerant days he was often on the brink of disaster, but always miraculously saved. It is said that he once underwent surgery for a fistula

without anaesthesia. He had a strange capacity to fast for days together and, if he liked, he could eat an enormous quantity of food.

Swami Trigunatitananda later went to San Francisco, replacing Swami Turiyananda who was ill. There, through his organizational capacity, his strict self-discipline, and his tireless zeal, he established the Vedanta centre in San Francisco on a firm footing. He gave classes for the eager students of Vedanta and spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna in other cities, thus becoming instrumental in sowing the seeds of Vedanta for the future.

In 1904, Swami Trigunatitananda felt that a permanent building should be erected to house the Vedanta Society. This was the beginning of a great achievement of the Swami — the first Hindu Temple built in the Western world. It was dedicated on 7 January 1906. With regard to the future of the temple, the Swami said, 'Believe me, believe me, if there is the least tinge of selfishness in building this temple it will fall, but if it is the Master's work, it will stand.'

Just three months after the dedication, on 18 April 1906, San Francisco suffered a terrible earthquake followed by a devastating fire, causing heavy damage to property all around. Apprehensive of the temple catching fire, many inmates and others who had taken shelter there left. But Trigunatitananda did not move. He prayed for the safety of the people of the city. Strangely enough, as the fire approached the temple, the wind that was blowing in its direction changed its course and the temple was saved.

But his life suddenly came to an end due to a very unfortunate incident. Three days after Christmas in 1914 the Swami was delivering a lecture in the temple auditorium. Suddenly there was a deafening sound. One of his earlier students, who had gone crazy, went up to the platform and exploded a bomb, killing himself and severely wounding the Swami. The Swami was immediately taken to the hospital. On the way he inquired in a compassionate voice, 'Where is __, poor fellow?' In spite of the best medical treatment he breathed his last on 10 January 1915. A large number of people attended his funeral service.

Tremendous dynamism, indomitable courage, unswerving devotion to the ideal, selfless service, and infinite enthusiasm to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna — these are the special characteristics of Swami Trigunatitananda, and with these no one can fail to make an immense contribution to society; and following are some of the important contributions of the Swami.

In 1897, the district of Dinajpur was under the grip of a terrible famine. The Swami, inspired by the ideal of service, plunged into action and organized relief work, himself living on alms or going with very little or no food. Day and night he worked hard to distribute food to starving people.

Swami Trigunatitananda had a desire to start a magazine in Bengali for spreading the message of the Master, and Swami Vivekananda encouraged him when he was in the West. On Swamiji's return to India, the idea took practical shape. Swamiji then gave some money for starting the magazine, and accordingly a press was bought. Swamiji named the magazine *Udbodhan*. To run this periodical Swami Trigunatitananda had to undergo unbelievable hardships. He was the editor, the manager, and it was he who had to collect subscribers. Without caring for his own comfort and health, he completely offered his life to the magazine, which was everything to him for the time being. The energy that he put forth in making this journal a success was so great that the magazine is still running successfully and has observed its centenary in 1997.

Another memorable contribution of the Swami was his work in America. Because of him the credit for building the first Hindu Temple in the West goes to the Mission. The edifice still remains as a monument to his contribution. Besides establishing the Vedanta Society, the Swami started a monastery also. Some of the young men attending his classes, being inspired to live the life of brahmachārins, became the inmates of the monastery. Afterwards he started a nunnery at the earnest entreaties of some women disciples. The Swami also started a monthly magazine there called *Voice of Freedom*.

Swami Subodhananda

Subodh Chandra Ghosh was born in Calcutta on 8 November 1867. His parents were very pious and he acquired their religious disposition. Even from his boyhood he had the feeling that he was not meant for the householder's life. In fact, he deliberately failed in the matriculation examinations just to avoid marriage, for it was decided to arrange his marriage after the examinations.

While reading the Bengali book *The Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* by Suresh Chandra Datta, Subodh was attracted to Sri Ramakrishna, and one day he went to meet him. Seeing the boy, the Master grasped his hand, remained

in meditation for a while, and then said: 'You will realize the goal. Mother says so.' When Subodh met him on another occasion, Sri Ramakrishna stroked Subodh's body from the navel to the throat and wrote something on his tongue — all in a state of ecstasy. Subodh then sat for meditation. His body was shaking and he had a strange experience of something moving from the base of the spinal column to the brain. Then he saw a brilliant light in which innumerable forms of gods and goddesses appeared and again merged in the Infinite. After some time he opened his eyes and saw the Master stroking his body the opposite way.

His childlike simplicity and character remained with him throughout his life. Thus he was known as Khoka (child) Maharaj among his brother disciples and devotees.

After the passing away of the Master he took monastic vows and became Swami Subodhananda. He then went to several places of pilgrimage and practised spiritual disciplines at different places in the Himalayas. Though he was inclined towards the life of seclusion, he responded to Swamiji's call for spreading the message of the Master and doing good to suffering humanity, and he worked in various capacities for the cause of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Swami Subodhananda was among the first group of trustees of Belur Math appointed by Swamiji in 1901, and was afterwards elected treasurer of the Ramakrishna Mission. Later he became the Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

Towards the end of his life he was afflicted with several physical ailments, but while on his deathbed he said, 'When I think of the Master, I become forgetful of all physical sufferings.' At the time of death he was calm and serene, absolutely free from any anxiety. The end came on 2 December 1932. On the previous night he uttered his last words: 'My last prayer is that the blessings of the Lord be always on the Order.' This prayer, issuing from a loving heart with absolute sincerity and concern, is a great contribution to the Ramakrishna Order, because he had poured his whole life into it.

When we reflect on his contribution to the Mission, we remember his active involvement in the activities of the organization. During the great plague epidemic in Calcutta in 1899, when the Ramakrishna Mission plague service was initiated, Subodhananda was one of those who worked hard for the relief of the helpless and panic-stricken people.

Again in 1908 he rushed to participate in the relief work during the great famine in the Chilka islands of Orissa. His tender heart would always respond to the distress and suffering of the people. He was often found near sick-beds nursing the sick at the risk of his own health. Once people were amazed to see him nursing with great love and attention a young student suffering from smallpox of a very malignant type. There are occasions when he begged money from others in order to help poor patients with their diet and medicine. He helped many poor families with money given to him by devotees. One family near Belur Math was even saved from starvation by the kindness of the Swami. These loving qualities of the Swami are great ideals for the Mission to cherish and follow.

Later, though he could not work so much, Subodhananda would inspire people to dedicate themselves to the work started by Swamiji. During the last period of his life he made extensive tours in Bengal and Bihar and became instrumental in spreading the message of the Master. He would even go to the outlying parts of Bengal, unmindful of physical discomforts and inconveniences. From morning till late at night, with little time left for personal rest, he would meet people and talk of the message of the Master and Swamiji. But one could find no strain on his face. It goes without saying that this kind of zeal is the very soul of any organization working for the betterment of society, and here is a great lesson to be learnt by all those who are dedicated to the Mission. Subodhananda's contribution in providing a role model for the humanitarian activities of the Mission can never be exaggerated.

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[13] *Vani*, Vol. I, p. 10.

[14] Ibid., Vol. II, p. 18.

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The Lay Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna

SWARAJ MAZUMDAR

THE VETERANS of the Ramakrishna Order used to tell the junior monks and brahmachārins quite often that 'first Ramakrishna, and then Mission'. This is a very significant remark which we should never forget, because Sri Ramakrishna is the ideal, and both the Math and the Mission are but two instruments to translate that ideal into action. Sri Ramakrishna is the end, and the twin organizations are the means. The means are no doubt very important, but without the ideal they lose their dimension and vitality.

Therefore, the first thing we ought to bear in mind is that it is Ramakrishna's Mission. But what was his mission? Why did God incarnate in the form of a temple priest of Dakshineswar? I personally believe, one special significance of the Ramakrishna Incarnation is to raise the householders throughout the world above the quagmire of this evanescent worldly life and elevate their consciousness to a spiritual level where they can get back their lost individuality. The monks in India had their age-old ideal of liberation before them. For them the advent of Avatar was not perhaps as urgent as it was for the great majority of the worldly people who live within the narrow confines of a family and whose 'ideal' is eating, drinking, and merry-making. It is for these teeming billions, the hopeless, suffering humanity who wallow in the mud-puddle of sensuality, that Sri Ramakrishna came with his chalice of love and words of hope. Perhaps, because of his unbounded compassion for the average man and woman, who get entangled in the meshes of the world, Sri Ramakrishna lived the life of a unique householder, although he was a sannyāsin, only to show that living such a life is possible.[1] Not

only that it is possible, it is necessary in this age. He lived in this world, but he was not of this world. Thus, what he wanted to stress is that, no matter where you live — in the family or the mountain cave — the goal is the same, viz. God-realization. Apparently the paths of the monks and the householders look somewhat different. For the monks total renunciation is a must. For the householders mental dispassion is necessary. This was what Sri Ramakrishna prescribed. But if we observe his prescription sharply, we realize Sri Ramakrishna did not make any compromise between the ideal and reality. Only, as if to tone down the rigour of renunciation a little, he said that the householders have to have mental detachment. But those who have tried to renounce a little know that if there is no desire within, it is bound to be reflected in day-to-day life. In other words, if there is renunciation within, the same will automatically manifest externally. If that happens, where is then the real difference between a genuine monk and a really detached householder?[2]

Thus Sri Ramakrishna's life was a unique mould. Anyone accepting him as an ideal gradually becomes transformed, and his renunciation and love for God increase day by day. Holy Mother Sarada Devi said that if there was any speciality of Sri Ramakrishna, it was his natural renunciation. And Swami Vivekananda wrote in one of his letters that the hallmark of a child of Ramakrishna is his renunciation. Renunciation is the test. And all the lay devotees and admirers of the Master more or less developed a sense of non-attachment and played a significant role in the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna when he was alive, and later, when he started working through his subtle body that comprises the Math and the Mission. Unfortunately, this role has not been brought into a wider focus because, after all, it was the all-renouncing disciples of Ramakrishna who came forward to give up their lives for their Master's cause as well as for the realization of God and doing good to humanity. And who can ever doubt that in matters of renunciation, selflessness, and love for God the householders are just like fireflies as compared to the solar glow of the monks? Nevertheless the history of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission is bound to be one-sided and partial if, even after the lapse of one hundred years, the role of the householder devotees and admirers in strengthening the Ramakrishna Sangha is not fully taken into account.[3]

Though the Ramarkrishna Mission was officially founded in 1897, the first Math had already been set up at Baranagore in 1886 in a rented house. On 11 December 1885 Sri Ramakrishna came to the Cossipore garden house for treatment, and there he trained his young disciples, especially Narendra, how to live the life of a monk and work together to alleviate the sufferings of the world by giving it the fire of spirituality. Later Swami Vivekananda and his brother disciples admitted that the Ramakrishna Math really started at the Cossipore garden house and Sri Ramakrishna himself was its architect. Swamiji wrote in a letter in 1897: 'All our associations centre round that garden. In reality that was our first Math.'[4]

But, though the process of uniting the devotees gained pace at Cossipore, in reality it started in Dakshineswar;[5] for it was from the roof top of the Dakshineswar 'Kuthi bari' that Sri Ramakrishna wept bitterly for the non-arrival of pure devotees, without whom he could not live any more. And from 1879 his devotees began to arrive one after another in quick succession — first the lay devotees and admirers, and then the younger aspirants who formed the nucleus of the future Ramakrishna Order.

Historically speaking, for the purpose of evaluating the contribution of the lay devotees and admirers to the Ramakrishna Mission (and also to the Ramakrishna Math, as both 'Math' and 'Mission' remained interchangeable terms for many years),[6] we ought to go back to 1855 when Rani Rasmani founded the temples at Dakshineswar.

Within the circle of the Ramakrishna devotees, the monks included, there is a conviction that the Math and the Mission constitute the subtle body of Sri Ramakrishna, and any service rendered to the Math and Mission is a service rendered to Sri Ramakrishna. In a similar vein it is held that loyalty to the Sangha is an expression of loyalty to Sri Ramakrishna.[7] If that is so, can we ignore the roles played by the devotees who took all possible care of Sri Ramakrishna when he was in his gross body, particularly during the period when the all-pure, dedicated youths had not arrived at Dakshineswar? The answer is no. Hence we begin with Rani Rasmani whose name is inseparably associated with the Ramakrishna Movement.

The Lay Devotees in the First Phase

Rani Rasmani

In those early days when Sri Ramakrishna was unknown, the pious Rani took good care of him and created an atmosphere that would be congenial to his spiritual practices. The full significance of the life and the part she played in helping Ramakrishna to establish dharma suitable for the modern age cannot be unravelled by mere intellect and reasoning. For, after all, she was, according to Sri Ramakrishna, one of the eight associates of the Divine Mother who came to spread Her glory.

Mathuranath Biswas

The son-in-law of Rasmani, Mathuranath Biswas, played an even greater and more active role in the sādhaka-phase of Sri Ramakrishna's life. In the language of Sri Ramakrishna, Mathur was the first and principal among his four *rasaddars* (suppliers of provisions). He served the Master for fourteen years so obediently and with such dedication that one is amazed. Any wish of Ramakrishna was an order to him and he fulfilled it. Whenever Ramakrishna fell sick, Mathur arranged for his treatment; whenever Ramakrishna wanted to serve the devotees and wandering monks, feed the hungry, help the poor peasants, or visit a place, Mathur readily nodded in agreement. He was so worried about Sri Ramakrishna's personal safety that once he even went to Panihati in disguise along with his own securitymen so that the Master would not be mobbed by enthusiastic admirers and devotees. It is also significant that when Sri Ramakrishna's contemplative mood became too deep to perform the ritualistic worship of Bhavatārini, it was Mathur who exempted the former from his assigned duties and allowed him to enjoy all the facilities as before.

Manimohan Sen and Sambhucharan Mallick

After Mathur died on 16 July 1871, Manimohan Sen, a devotee of Ramakrishna, began to look after the personal needs of the Master. But he could not do it for long because another enterprising devotee, Sambhucharan Mallick, started visiting Ramakrishna and he himself took the responsibility of serving

the Master. He took special care of the food and other articles which the Master needed and paid the conveyance whenever necessary. In this manner he continued to serve Ramakrishna till 1877. Not only the Master, his consort, Sarada Devi, too received Sambhu's service. In 1876 he constructed a hut at Dakshineswar for the Holy Mother and arranged for her treatment when she was suffering terribly from dysentery. Again it was this Sambhucharan who read to Sri Ramakrishna from the Bible and the latter then came to know about the life of Jesus. These facts are not insignificant when we view the Master's life in retrospect and in its totality.

Manomohan Mitra and Ramchandra Datta

On 13 November 1879 Manomohan Mitra of Konnagar and one of his relations, Ramchandra Datta, came to Dakshineswar. Swami Virajananda, the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, writes:

> Manomohan had a special place among those who enjoyed the divine grace of the God-Incarnate Sri Ramakrishna and moulded their spiritual lives as also helped and participated to some extent in Ramakrishna's divine play.[9]

Indeed, Manomohan increasingly felt that his whole family belonged to Sri Ramakrishna and he was merely its custodian. It was he who brought his brother-in-law Rakhal, later Swami Brahmananda, to the Master. Again to Manomohan and Ramchandra Datta goes the credit of first preaching to the public of Konnagar and Calcutta that Sri Ramakrishna is the God-incarnate of this age. It is also significant that they got their Master's consent in this matter. Sri Ramakrishna, however, restrained them later saying that they should not exaggerate him and distort his message. Manomohan helped Ramchandra financially and otherwise in publishing *Tattvasār* and *Tattvaprakāshika*, which contained the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. He also helped Ramchandra when the latter launched the monthly *Tattvamanjari*, which used to be distributed free among the devotees. Manomohan spent liberally when the Master became seriously ill and began to serve him even at Cossipore. In the first half of 1887 he visited the Baranagore monastery and was so shocked by the poverty and hardship of his brother disciples that he met Girish Chandra Ghosh and other senior disciples of the Master and arranged a monthly donation to the Math.

Not only that, whenever the monks fell ill, he would bring them to his residence and serve them with love. He also gave his labour of love when the Ramakrishna temple at Kankurgachi was constructed by Ramchandra Datta. Manomohan was attached to a number of associations that came up after Swami Vivekananda's glorious participation in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, and everywhere he actively preached the message of his Master till the last days of his life.

Manomohan and Ramchandra Datta, a medical practitioner and chemist, were a great pair, and we have already mentioned how, in cooperation with his cousin, Ram voluntarily undertook the responsibility of preaching about Sri Ramakrishna even when the latter was alive. In this respect they rank next to the great Brahmo leader and admirer of Sri Ramakrishna, Keshab Chandra Sen. Between 1893 and 1897 Ram gave eighteen lectures at Star Theatre, City Theatre, and Minerva Theatre on Sri Ramakrishna's message. He developed such great devotion to Ramakrishna that his passion for preaching the Master knew no bounds, and at times it appeared to many as an expression of his ego. But in reality that was not so.[10]

It is also true that all along his mission was to serve the devotees. He never disappointed those who sought his help, material or spiritual. He was also a great organizer. During the Master's lifetime the devotees used to celebrate the occasion whenever Sri Ramakrishna would visit their house. And Ram was always ready to help and guide them. The 'Kankurgachi Yogodyan', which is now a part of the Ramakrishna Math, is a testament to his dedication and faith in the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna.[11]

Surendranath Mitra

Sri Ramakrishna used to often say that 'devotees are like *kalmi* (a kind of aquatic creeper with numerous branches); pull one branch and the rest will come to your hand.' So it was again Ramchandra Datta who brought his neighbour Surendranath Mitra (often called Suresh or Surendra) to Sri Ramakrishna in 1880. Surendra was an employee of a merchant firm and lived at Simulia in North Calcutta. As a lay devotee his contribution to the Ramakrishna Movement was immense. In a letter written to Swami Brahmananda in 1895, Swami Vivekananda wrote:

> You remember, I suppose, how after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, all forsook us as so many worthless, ragged boys. Only people like Balaram, Suresh, Master, and Chuni Babu were our friends at that hour of need. And we shall never be able to repay our debts to them.[12]

Indeed, Surendra began to serve Sri Ramakrishna as a half *rasaddar* shortly after he started visiting Dakshineswar. His purse was always open for the Master's comfort. He used to give ten rupees every month so that the devotees visiting Sri Ramakrishna could have something to eat.[13] He also used to supply bedclothes and pillows for the comfort of the devotees who frequently spent nights at Dakshineswar. Again it was he who introduced the celebration of Ramakrishna's birthday in 1881, and for three consecutive years bore all the expenses. When Sri Ramakrishna was shifted to Cossipore for treatment of cancer, he not only paid the rent of eighty rupees per month, but also gladly bore other expenses. After the passing away of the Master, when the young unmarried disciples spent their days in great anguish and uncertainty, Surendra said to them:

> Brothers, where will you go? Let us rent a house. You will live there and make it our Master's shrine; and we householders shall come there for consolation. How can we pass all our days and nights with our wives and children in the world? I used to spend a sum of money for the Master at Cossipore. I shall gladly give it for your expenses.[14]

On the basis of Surendra's large-hearted assurance, Narendra, later Swami Vivekananda, with the counsel of Bhavanath, another lay disciple of the Master, rented a house at Baranagore that became gradually transformed into a monastery. Swamiji later commented rightly:

> You have doubtless heard Suresh Babu's name. He was in a way the founder of this Math. It was he who used to bear all the expenses of the Baranagore Math. It was this Suresh Mitra who used to think most for us in those days. His devotion and faith have no parallel.[15]

Sri Mahendranath Gupta wrote:

> Surendra was indeed a blessed soul. It was he who laid the foundation of the great Order later associated with Sri Ramakrishna's name. His devotion and sacrifice made it possible for those earnest souls to renounce the world

for the realization of God. Through him Sri Ramakrishna made it possible for them to live in the world as embodiments of his teaching, the renunciation of 'woman and gold' and the realization of God.

The brothers lived at the Math like orphan boys. Sometimes they would not have the money to pay their house rent; sometimes they would have no food in the monastery. Surendra would come and settle all these things. He was the big brother of the monks. Later on, when they thought of his genuine love, the members of this first Math shed tears of gratitude.[16]

Surendra was never content to taste alone the bliss he discovered in Sri Ramakrishna. On the contrary, he was ever eager to share it with others. Therefore he regularly invited Sri Ramakrishna to his residence and invited other devotees to participate in the *mahotsava*. It was at his residence that Sri Ramakrishna first met Narendra. Surendra also had a painting made by an artist and prepared a symbol to preach the truth that all religions are essentially one and lead to the same goal — the fundamental teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. Ramchandra and Manomahan inspired him in this task.

From Swamiji's letter to Pramadadas Mitra of Varanasi written on 26 May 1890, we also learn:

> The two gentlemen [Balaram and Surendra] mentioned above had a strong desire to have some land purchased on the banks of the Ganga and see the sacred remains [of Sri Ramakrishna] enshrined on it, with the disciples living there together; and Suresh Babu had offered a sum of Rs. 1,000 for the purpose, promising to give more, but for some inscrutable purpose of God he left this world yesternight![17]

Balaram Bose

One of the most beloved of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Balaram Bose of Baghbazar, deserves special mention. From 1882 till Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, he served Ramakrishna as humbly as a servant serves his master. He supplied all the food items that the Master needed. It was only at Balaram's house that Sri Ramakrishna accepted rice and spent the night, because he considered the food offered by Balaram to be pure. Balaram's house was his 'second fort', as it were, where he would summon his devotees, especially the

younger ones, who could not afford to go to Dakshineswar now and then. According to Swami Adbhutananda, Sri Ramakrishna visited the house of Balaram more than a hundred times.

Balaram himself lived a very simple life and thereby saved money which he spent for the Master and his devotees. His wife, Krishnabhavani Devi, in fact the whole family, took great delight in serving Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and their devotees of all shades, especially the monks. Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Turiyananda, Adbhutananda and other brother monks stayed at Balaram Bhavan for months together. Many of them, including Holy Mother, Yogin-Ma, and others, spent months at the temple house of the Bose family at Vrindavan. The place known as 'Kalababu's Kunja' also served as the first Sevashrama of the Ramakrishna Mission at Vrindavan till 1915. The sannyāsin disciples of Ramakrishna also depended on Balaram's counsel in many matters. When the Baranagore Math was set up, Balaram used to give material and financial help. In short, he was one of the genuine friends of the monks whose debts Swamiji said could never be repaid. Moreover, we should never forget that the first meeting of the lay devotees, admirers, and monks to form an association, that is, the Ramakrishna Mission, took place on 1 May 1897 at the residence of Balaram at 57 Ramkanta Bose Street. The weekly meetings of the newly-formed Mission also used to be held at the same place. The author of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* therefore commented: 'Blessed you are Balaram! Your house has today become the main theatre of Sri Ramakrishna's work.'[18]

Mahendranath Gupta (M)

Only a noble soul can see nobility in others. Sri 'M' or Mahendranath Gupta, perhaps the most well known of all householder disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, was such a gem of a devotee. He was the goodwill of Sri Ramakrishna, and his greatest contribution to the entire Ramakrishna Movement was the recording of the Master's words in stenographic details, which were later published in Bengali as *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* and translated into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. During the past one hundred years or so, this book has inspired millions of people throughout the world to have faith in God and live a spiritual life. Hundreds of old monks of the Order have

also testified that they were inspired to embrace the life of renunciation after reading the *Kathāmrita.* I believe the trend will continue for centuries to come. In a letter dated 24 November 1897, Swamiji wrote to Mahendranath: 'I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work.'[19]

Apart from writing the *Kathāmrita,* M served Ramakrishna and Holy Mother in many ways. And he helped Swami Vivekananda and his family quietly when there was no help from any other quarter. He also secured a teaching job for Swamiji in one of Vidyasagar's school. He was a great sympathizer of the Math and Mission and used to spend a few days whenever possible at the Baranagore or Alambazar Math. When Swamiji was abroad he often served as his agent in Calcutta. In 1895 Swamiji wrote to Swami Abhedananda: 'I am sending the cheque in the name of Master Mahashay Mahendra Babu.'[20] In 1897 Swamiji wrote to Swami Brahmananda: 'You must persuade Mahendra Babu and get up an agitation about this matter [the starting of an orphanage], so that the people of Calcutta are induced to take up the charge of these orphans — such a movement is very desirable.'[21] In another letter he exhorts M to 'write now and then about us in *The Tribune*, so that Lahore will not become cold again — now it is quite warmed up.'[22] Swamiji and his brother disciples had 'an implicit faith in him', and their bond of love never snapped. Swamiji's letters reveal that he always consulted M in business matters, be it a purchase of land or some other such thing. In a long letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda, Swamiji wrote from the USA: 'A thousand thanks to Mahendra Babu for his kindly helping us. He is a very liberal-hearted man.'[23]

Sri M was a householder, no doubt, but of a rare kind. Throughout his life he inspired pure young souls to embrace the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna and a life of monasticism. He inspired them to visit the Math regularly and serve the monks. Swami Virajananda, Swami Shuddhananda, and many of their friends who later became pillars of the Math and Mission were thus greatly inspired by Sri M. If this is not a contribution, I do not know what else is!

Girish Chandra Ghosh

In appreciation of Girish Chandra Ghosh, another famous householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Gambhiranandaji wrote: 'Girish Chandra's

contribution towards the strengthening of the Sri Ramakrishna Sangha is immense.'[24]

True, he was not a rich man and could not help the Math and Mission much financially, but he worked as a bulwark for the sannyāsins in those early days. If his faith in Sri Ramakrishna was proverbial, it was also so in the case of the monks. When Narendra and others were criticized by many, he used to raise his thunderous voice in defence and say:

> They are like butter drawn from the milk churned before dawn. How can they mix in water again? If I find them doing anything wrong, I will tell myself: They cannot commit any mistake; my eyes have become defective, hence I see their defects.[25]

When some of the senior householder devotees alleged that the younger boys, who served their Master day and night, were misusing money and were not keeping correct accounts, Girish raised his voice of protest and assured Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra, and the others that he would sell the bricks of his house, if needed, to serve the Master. He, of course, did not have to go that far because the senior devotees soon realized their mistake.

Between 1909 and 1910 he spent a few months at Varanasi near the Sevashrama and served the patients of the Sevashrama with homeopathic medicines. During the later part of his life he talked about Sri Ramakrishna before the devotees and the monks so forcefully that all felt the palpable presence of Sri Ramakrishna in him. He often used to say boastfully, 'Look at my life and realize who Sri Ramakrishna was!'

Chunilal Basu

We do not know much about Chunilal Basu's contribution. But Swamiji's letter[26] reveals that he was a friend in need. Swami Gambhirananda also describes him as the 'genuine friend of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.'[27]

Devendranath Majumdar

Among the other householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna mention should be made of Devendranath Majumdar, Suresh Chandra Datta, Nabagopal

Ghosh, Purna Chandra Ghosh , Akshay Kumar Sen, Kalipada Ghosh, Manindra Krishna Gupta, Upendranath Mukhopadhyay, Haramohan Mitra, Yogin-Ma, and Golap-Ma. For paucity of space we shall deal with them very briefly, though some of their contributions were really outstanding.

Devendranath preached Sri Ramakrishna through his personal life of devotion. He set up an Archanalaya at Entally, composed many beautiful songs in praise of Ramakrishna, and inspired many young people to serve 'Jiva as Shiva' as per the ideal which Ramakrishna preached through Vivekananda. All along he maintained a loving relationship with his brother disciples including Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Premananda, Shivananda, Saradananda, and Akhandananda. When Swami Akhandananda set up an Ashrama at Sargachi, Devendra used to raise money and regularly sent it to the Ashrama.

Suresh Chandra Datta and Akshay Kumar Sen

Suresh Chandra Datta and Akshay Kumar Sen have earned our gratitude by writing *Paramahamsa Ramakrishner Ukti* (1884) and *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (the life of Ramakrishna in easily readable verse form) respectively. In appreciation of the book, Swamiji wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda from the USA: 'Through his pen Sri Ramakrishna is manifesting himself. Blessed is Akshay!' In 1896 Akshay published *Padye Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsadever Upadesh*, and in 1910 *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Mahima* in question-and-answer form. The last book shows his literary craftsmanship and wonderful understanding of the Master and his philosophy. Akshay also served Holy Mother from time to time when she stayed at Jayrambati.

Haramohan Mitra

Swami Vivekananda's boyhood friend and a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Haramohan Mitra, also played a significant role in preaching the message of the Master and Swamiji at a time when there were not too many in the field. Haramohan published Suresh Chandra Datta's book on the teachings of Ramakrishna. He also published Swamiji's Chicago lectures immediately after the Swami stirred the American mind, and distributed them free among the citizens of Calcutta. Swamiji later allowed him to print and publish his other

lectures as well. It was he who first popularized Max Müller's *Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings* in India. Haramohan was a man of courage. Through his speeches and writings he always defended the ideals of Ramakrishna and Hinduism. In those days Sri Ramakrishna's photos were not easily available. Haramohan sold them to the devotees and spoke with great love and respect about the disciples of the Master. In this manner, many got attracted to the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna. Haramohan was poor but he never ran after money. He spent much of his earnings on the service of Holy Mother.[28]

Upendranath Mukhopadhyay

Upendranath Mukhopadhyay, the proprietor of the Basumati and a devotee of Ramakrishna, also actively supported the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. When on 18 February 1897,[29] Vivekananda's brother monks and other householder devotees were worried about the turnout at the reception of Swamiji on his arrival at Sealdah station in Calcutta the following day, Upendranath relieved them by saying that he had already distributed thousands of handbills and posters in all parts of the city to announce the triumphal return of the patriot-prophet; hence there was no cause for concern. In fact the turnout was overwhelming, and Swami Shuddhananda describes this momentous event graphically in his reminiscences.[30]

Upendra was always very eager to serve the monks and the devotees. Swami Akhandananda in his *Smriti Katha* describes how Upendra used to feed the hungry monks whenever they would arrive at his small shop at night and arrange a carriage for them to reach the Baranagore monastery. Swami Adbhutananda often used to stay at the Basumati office and receive Upendra's help. Indeed, his office, writes Swami Gambhirananda, was not only a meeting place for literati but also the admirers of Sri Ramakrishna.

Nabagopal Ghosh and Kalipada Ghosh

Nabagopal Ghosh and his wife rendered personal assistance and service to many monks of the Order, especially during their illness. Kalipada Ghosh, an intimate friend of Girish, also organized the birth anniversaries of Ramakrishna and participated in the *mahotsava*. From his house came the payas

(milk pudding) which Sri Ramakrishna relished at Shyampukur on the night of the Kali Puja. He also joined in the group which bore some of the medical expenses of the Master. Many of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, including Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Abhedananda, Turiyananda, and Akhandananda received his generous hospitality when Kalipada was in Bombay. While in Rangoon, Kalipada, under the banner of 'Ramakrishna Sevak Samity', strengthened the Ramakrishna Movement there.

Purna Chandra Ghosh

Purna Chandra Ghosh, whom Sri Ramakrishna described as an *Ishvarakoti* (a perfected soul born with a special spiritual message), had to live in Delhi and Simla, as he was a government employee. But he kept close contact with his brother disciples, especially the monks of the Order, and occasionally served them. Swami Turiyananda and others stayed at his place, and he helped them financially although he was not wealthy. At the request of the members of the Vivekananda Society, he accepted the post of its secretary in 1907 and began to inspire the young members of the Society to follow the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. When Madame Calvè, the famous French singer and admirer of Swamiji, came to Calcutta, Purna Chandra called on her and presented her an album of Swamiji's photographs.

Manindra Krishna Gupta

Manindra Krishna Gupta was very young when Sri Ramakrishna was ailing at Shyampukur. Therefore he was allowed to serve the Master only in the day time. He also served the Master at Cossipore. Holy Mother said:

> On the day of Dol (the festival of colours) Khoka (Manindra) and Paltu were fanning Sri Sri Thakur during his illness. Everybody was playing with colours. Thakur repeatedly asked them to join in the play. But they didn't leave Thakur alone. At this Thakur started weeping and said, 'They are my Ramlala [Baby Rama]'.[31]

Swami Vivekananda was very fond of Manindra Krishna, possibly because of his spirit of service. His relations with the monks and the lay devotees were

always cordial. Swamis Yogananda, Saradananda, Trigunatitananda and others frequently visited his house. He also visited the Baranagore and Alambazar monasteries whenever he had any opportunity to do so.

Durgacharan Nag

Durgacharan Nag, or 'Nag Mahashay', lived the life of an ideal householder. Being a man of exceptionally devotional nature and reclusive habits, and living mostly in a remote village of East Bengal, he could not serve the Master or his Mission directly, but by living a highly spiritual life he inspired many people to live the life of an ideal householder or to embrace monasticism. Swamiji's disciple Sharat Chandra Chakravarty was greatly inspired by Nag Mahashay.

Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma

Now we come to the two most remarkable lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma, whose contributions to the history of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission are of immense importance. Both of them had the distinction of serving the Holy Trinity of the Ramakrishna Order. They had served Sri Ramakrishna when he was in his gross body, they served Sarada Devi day and night along with her relations, and they also served the monks and other devotees indefatigably. One day Sri Ramakrishna said to Yogin-Ma: 'What is left to be done? You have seen me, fed me, served me!'[32] Holy Mother also depended very much on Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma, so much so that she said, 'I can't go to Calcutta if Golap and Yogin aren't there.' Indeed, be it Vrindavan, Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house or Udbodhan, Yogin-Ma was always with the Mother like a tree and its shadow. At times Holy Mother sought her counsel and consulted her on different matters. It was Yogin-Ma who accompanied Holy Mother when she observed the *pancatapa* vow. At Udbodhan she served the Mother in all possible ways. Indeed, such service was part of her intense spiritual life. When Nivedita wrote the *Cradle Tales of Hinduism*, Yogin-Ma helped her. The Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Swami Saradananda, also received great help from her at the time of writing his magnum opus, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*. Swami Viveka-

nanda respected Yogin-Ma so much for her spirituality and spirit of renunciation that he believed the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna would be transmitted to Indian women through Yogin-Ma and other such noble women.

If Yogin-Ma was quiet and contemplative, Golap-Ma was very much active and outspoken. She began to serve the Master and Holy Mother when they lived at Dakshineswar. Later she served the Master and his devotees at Shyampukur and Cossipore. She was always a great help to Holy Mother in matters of cooking and managing her large family, which included the monks and streams of devotees at Udbodhan. She also protected the bashful Mother from her over-enthusiastic devotees. If Mother had to say anything, specially to the aged male devotees, she said it through Golap-Ma. In fact, like Yogin-Ma, Golap-Ma too followed Mother wherever she went. 'Golap is my prop', said Holy Mother. But despite working tirelessly, she did japa and meditation for hours. When she found time, she repaired the tattered mosquito nets of the monks or set herself to cleaning the Mother's bathroom or volunteered to serve the monks and brahmachārins in other ways.

From the discussion above we can reasonably conclude that in the initial stage the direct lay disciples and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna served the Sangha in four different ways. In the first place, they, in their various capacities, had served the gross body of the Sangha — namely, its spirit and architect, Sri Ramakrishna, the Mother of the Sangha, Sri Sarada Devi, and its executor, Swami Vivekananda — and participated more or less in the preparation of a suitable background in which the subtle body of the Master in the form of the Math and Mission could later function effectively. Secondly, they helped the Sangha by preaching the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, his life and teachings, of course, so far as they understood them. Thirdly, they, in their individual capacities, engaged themselves in the service of others, albeit on a limited scale. Finally, some of the devotees such as Gopaler Ma, Sri M, and Nag Mahashay developed a great spiritual life that became an object-lesson and inspired others to live a pure life of love and renunciation.

The Lay Devotees in the Second Phase

We now come to the second and definitely more glorious and eventful phase of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement in which the lay devotees

participated in a meaningful and concerted way. Most of these devotees did not see Sri Ramakrishna. They were visibly inspired and guided by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order, mainly Swami Vivekananda, his brother disciples, and the second and third generation of monks who gradually took up the mantle of the organization, especially the Ramakrishna Mission. These devotees included Indians as well as foreign nationals.

On 30 July 1897 Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter to Swami Akhandananda, 'The object of the Mission is to impart education and religion.'[33] Earlier, in the second meeting of 5 May 1897, in which the aims, objects, and the methods of action of the Ramakrishna Mission were accepted, it was decided that 'the aim of the Sangha is to preach those truths which Sri Ramakrishna has, for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental, and spiritual advancement.' It was further decided that the 'duty of the Mission is...the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of one undying Eternal Religion.'[34] And its methods of action, among other things, would be 'to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated by the life of Sri Ramakrishna....'[35]

While the contributions made by the lay devotees in the first phase, i.e. during Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime, were spontaneous, sporadic, personal, and somewhat unorganized, their contributions in the second phase have been marked by a conscious commitment to a universal ideal which may be described as 'being and becoming', or 'to be good and to do good to others'. This transformation in their approach was made possible by Swami Vivekananda who, through his constant preaching, revealed the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's advent and the essence of his teaching. And, according to his master plan, the sannyāsins were to be the vanguard of this new upsurge, but the householder devotees would have to be inspired and their help and cooperation solicited in order to bring about a socio-economic and spiritual upliftment of all humanity. Swamiji realized that only the all-renouncing monks could keep the ideal pure and blazing, but the lay devotees have the resources and power of action. If these two forces could be combined and coordinated, there would dawn a new awakening, a new social order. Swamiji was right, and the growth of the

Ramakrishna Mission during the past one hundred years has proved the soundness of his vision.

At the second meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission in which the monks and the devotees participated, Swami Vivekananda was appointed the General President, while Swamis Brahmananda and Yogananda became the President and Vice-President respectively of the Calcutta centre. Mr. Narendra Nath Mitra, a householder disciple of Ramakrishna and a solicitor, was elected Secretary, and Dr. Shashi Bhushan Ghosh and Sharat Chandra Sarkar, under-secretaries. Sharat Chandra Chakravarty, a disciple of Swamiji and the author of *Swami-Shishya Samvād*, was appointed Reader of scriptures.

This was just a humble beginning, but the power that lay behind the name 'Ramakrishna' and the dedication that distinguished his monks as well as many lay devotees soon began to manifest and take tangible forms, of course through many ups and down. But we need not go into that. We will only see how and to what extent the lay devotees contributed to the multifarious growth of the Math and, specially, the Mission. Swami Gambhirananda writes:

> The Math and Mission spread mainly as a result of personal effort and initiative. Almost all the centres in the initial stages grew out of wants felt and cooperation extended by the people of the locality no matter whether it was a province, a district or even a village.... The Belur authorities had then no central fund and had perforce to rely on local enthusiasm and cooperation.[36]

Elsewhere in the same book he writes:

> The seeds that Swami Vivekananda had sown broadcast were sprouting of their own accord whenever the soil was favourable. The promoters may have been monks or lay devotees, or even interested outsiders.... Most of the projects started on an experimental and individualistic basis with enthusiasm as their sole asset. Organization and thought of permanence came later.... Field workers would put their whole energy into their labour of love, and never grudge any inconvenience, nor be deterred by failures or adversities.[37]

This description applies to the genesis and growth of most of the Math and Mission centres, whether in India or abroad.

The South Indian Devotees and Admirers

Let us first remember with gratitude Swami Vivekananda's South Indian admirers and lay disciples led by Alasinga Perumal, whom K. Sundararama Iyer described as the 'life and soul of the work of all kinds done in South India in support of the Swami's ministry, or by his direction and suggestion.'[38] It was this selfless group of devotees in Madras led by Alasinga which first discovered Swamiji, so to say, and plunged into the work of collecting funds as soon as it came to know that Swamiji intended to go to the West for preaching the eternal message of Hinduism. Again, in 1897, when Swami Ramakrishnananda went to Madras at the behest of Swamiji to start a centre there, this group helped the Swami, and the 'Ramakrishna Home' was set up at a rented house in Triplicane. Within three months the Math could be removed to the ground floor rooms of 'Castle Kernan'. Biligiri Iyengar, an admirer of Swamiji, owned this and allowed it to be used by the Math without rent. In 1903 the Madras devotees collected funds for the construction of a permanent monastery and this dream came true when Mr. Kondia Chetty donated a piece of land at Mylapore. In 1907 the home for the Master was built. But this project could not have materialized so soon but for the all-out help of Ramaswamy Iyengar and Ramanujachariar, the two cousins who met Swamiji. Ramaswamy also started, with the help of Dr. M. C. Nanjunda Rao, an admirer of Swamiji, a home for poor students in 1905, which was later recognized as a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1918.

Earlier, in 1897, when Swami Akhandananda, aided by Swami Brahmananda, started the first relief work of the Mission at Mahula in Murshidabad district, the Madras devotees came forward to help the cause. To the Madras devotees, especially Alasinga Perumal, G. Venkataranga Rao, and M. C. Nanjunda Rao, goes the credit of launching a journal called the *Brahmavadin* on 14 September 1895. With the blessings of Swami Vivekananda the Madras devotees started another journal in July 1896, the *Prabuddha Bharata* or *Awakened India*, under the able editorship of B. Rajam Iyer. The great role these two journals played initially towards preaching Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic ideas is well known. Of the two, the latter is now one of the most popular English journals published by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

During the 1930s, the lay devotees of the South made remarkable contributions in the field of education. As a result many new educational institutions came up. In 1930 T. S. Avinashilingam set up the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya at Perianaickenpalayam in the Coimbatore district, which was affiliated to the Mission in 1935. It was followed by other institutions which germinated and grew solely by individual and local initiative without any central direction. A few, such as the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College of Madras, the group of girls' institutions called Sarada Vidyalaya, and the boys' schools at Tyagarajanagar, can be mentioned in this context. The Rajahmundry centre in East Godavari district was also made possible by the contribution from a munificent local devotee. Swami Gambhirananda admits that, 'There were many more Mission centres in other parts [of the erstwhile Madras Presidency] where the devotees and monks worked in unison, and devotees often had been the chief executives in such undertakings.'[39]

The Other Lay Devotees

Before we turn our attention to the contributions made by other devotees elsewhere in India and abroad, I would like to mention the name of the Raja of Mysore, who offered to bear the expenses of Swamiji's going to the West, and the Raja of Khetri, Ajit Singh, whose place became the first field of Swami Akhandananda's activities. When Swami Vivekananda returned to Calcutta on 19 February 1897 from his first visit to the West, he was given a rousing reception by the followers and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna, and the 'public was solidly behind the Alambazar brotherhood.'[40]

Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebrations, which became an important annual function since 1881, faced a problem in 1898 when the Trustees of the Kali temple raised an objection that the 'sanctity of the place would be defiled by the presence of the foreign disciples of Swami Vivekananda.' The Daws of Calcutta then came to the rescue and generously allowed the celebrations to be held on their temple premises close to Dakshineswar. The help may now seem trivial, but at the time of crisis it had great emotional value.

It is true Swamiji occasionally lashed out at his lazy, jealous, and unorganized countrymen, including the people of Bengal, but all that he did was to break their inertia. And the sleeping leviathan wriggled a little. In 1898,

when plague broke out in Calcutta, Swamiji was so worried that he thought of selling the Math grounds to raise money to serve the patients. But the funds to carry on immediate work came from the public and he did not have to take that extreme step. When plague reappeared in epidemic form the next year, the Calcutta youths again responded heartily to the call of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order and Sister Nivedita to provide relief to the plague-affected people. They also took part in cleaning the city roads and lanes to combat the threat of pestilence.

In 1899 Swami Virajananda and Swami Prakashananda visited the then East Bengal and inspired the local devotees to set up a Society at Dhaka. The Dhaka public came forward to help the Society when Swami Vivekananda himself visited the place in 1901.

In 1900 some self-sacrificing young men, especially Jaminiranjan, a penniless youth, started the 'Poor Men's Relief Association' in Varanasi. In 1903 the Association became an integral part of the Ramakrishna Mission and was renamed 'Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service'. Upendra Narayan Dev of Entally, a devotee of Swami Vivekananda, contributed four thousand rupees, and Tarini Charan Pal, another admirer of the Mission, donated two thousand rupees, his whole life savings, towards the construction of a permanent premises for the Home. In this connection we should also recall the contribution of five hundred rupees by the Maharaja of Bhinga for the establishment of a monastery in Varanasi. Swami Shivananda utilized this to set up the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama there in 1902.

The centre at Allahabad started in a similar way, from private efforts of some enthusiastic followers of Swami Vivekananda. They were members of the Brahmavadin Club. With the help of some of these young men and 'the public support', Swami Vijnanananda was able to construct a permanent building for a Ramakrishna Math in 1908.

The permanent building of Kankhal Sevashrama was also made possible by the funds provided by two Calcuttans — Mr. Bhajanlal Lohia and Mr. Harsahaimall Sukdevdas.

The name of Kedar Chandra Das will be ever remembered in the annals of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission for his gift of a plot of land at Baghbazar on which Swami Saradananda raised a house for Sri Sarada Devi, the Mother of the Sangha, in 1909.

The members of the Vivekananda Society, started in Calcutta in 1902, and the Ramakrishna Samiti Anath Bhandar, an orphanage started in Bowbazar in 1904, also supported from time to time the philanthropic work of the Mission.

The people of Barisal got attracted to the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in 1899, shortly after Swami Saradananda's visit to East Bengal. Around this time Swamiji's disciple Sharat Chandra Chakravarty took the initiative to form a group for the study of Vedanta. 'Gradually by 1910 more people cooperated with the group to give its philanthropic and religious works a constitutional shape. The institution was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission on 2 February 1911.'[41]

For the Dhaka centre, considerable help was received from Mohini Mohan Das, a devotee. From his house at Sabjimahal, the activities of the centre used to be organized. Nawab Khwajah Salimulla Bahadur also helped to start an indoor hospital, which was supervised by the centre. The mangement of the centre, including the hospital, was taken over by the Belur authorities in 1914.

The Sevashrama at Vrindavan was the brainchild of some local gentlemen who were inspired by the Home of Service at Varanasi. Chief among them were Jajneswar Chandra and his son. They were assisted by Brahmachāri Harendra of Belur Math. The Sevashrama started functioning at Kalababu's Kunja. The Management passed to the Ramakrishna Mission in 1908.

Sister Nivedita Girls' School always suffered from paucity of funds. But Sister Nivedita's and, later, Sister Christine's personality, dedication to the cause of Swamiji's work, and incredible love for India, enabled them to get the sympathy and cooperation from some enlightened ladies of Calcutta such as Labanya Prabha Basu, Lady Abala Basu (wife of Sir J. C. Bose), Srimati Saralabala Sarkar, Amiya Devi (daughter of Bepin Pal), and most important of all, Sudhira Bose, sister of Swami Prajnananda. They offered voluntary service to the school which was affiliated to the Mission in 1918.

In 1911, Ramakrishna Basu, son of Balaram Basu, donated some land in Puri because Swami Brahmananda had a fascination for this sacred place. In 1932 a monastery was built on that land. Similarly, Jogesh Chandra Ghosh made a gift of his house at Bhowanipur. In 1920 a Math centre under the name of Gadadhar Ashrama was set up there. Similar help in cash or kind or in labour of love contributed to the development of an orphanage in Baranagore

in 1912 and the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Sarisha. Nalini Ranjan Majumdar was the chief organizer of the work which started there in 1917.

The Vivekananda society of Jamshedpur was started by some employees of Tata Iron and Steel Company as a religious and philanthropic organization. Later it started educational activities. In 1927 the Society was recognized by the Mission.

The name of the Ramakrishna Mission today is inseparably associated with relief work. Whenever there is a famine, natural calamities like earthquakes and floods, or man-made miseries such as war and communal disturbances inside India, the Mission is by the side of the distressed, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion. The monks of the Order bear the burden of the work and conduct the relief operations, but everywhere they are assisted by local volunteers and devotees. In the past the Mission had to depend entirely on public charity for such operations because it had no fund of its own. We must remember in this connection the large-heartedness of the late Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya of Calcutta who 'gave the Belur authorities *carte blanche* to start any relief work that was necessary and inform him.' He only imposed two conditions: First, his donations should remain anonymous. Second, any unused portion of the money should be returned to him. Needless to say this was a great help to the Mission and its relief work initially. Later, of course, the general public, devotees, private institutions, and the National Government began contributing liberally to the Mission fund whenever there has been any need to do so. For instance, during the famine of the 1940s the gift of money and several houses at Rahara by Srimati Induprabha Mukherjee, wife of late Satish Chandra Mukherjee, the proprietor of the Basumati, enabled the Mission to start an orphanage in 1944 with thirty-seven boys.

The intellectuals of Calcutta and elsewhere also contributed their mite to the cause espoused by the Mission. Prof. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, Prof. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, and many others gave their labour of love to the Mission whenever required. Prof. Benoy Kumar Sarkar 'splendidly helped' Swami Sambuddhananda during the centenary celebration of Sri Ramakrishna. The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, which now serves as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures and is one of the busiest centres engaged in disseminating Vedantic ideas of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and the Holy Mother, was supported and nourished by

the intellectuals of Calcutta since its very inception. This branch centre is now the meeting ground of scholars from all parts of the world.

During the first and second conventions of the Math and Mission, innumerable devotees and private institutions gave their labour of love and generous financial help. Similar was the case with the massive celebrations of Swami Vivekananda's birth centenary, his 125th birth anniversary, the centenary of Swamiji's historic participation in the Chicago Parliament of Religions, the Mission's centenary celebration in 1997, and the 150th birth anniversary celebration of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in 2003-2004, throughout India and abroad.

The names of two organizations, 'Pallimangal' and the 'Lokasiksha Parishad', deserve special mention. While the first works mainly inside West Bengal, the second has been working wonderfully among rural people throughout India. Both these organizations are ably supported by volunteers and the lay devotees. I wish to mention the name of one particular devotee, Sri Shiv Shankar Chakraborty, who has been admirably conducting the work of the Parishad, a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission, Narendrapur, for years.

The Western Devotees and Admirers

The contribution of foreign devotees and admirers to the growth and development of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission or, broadly speaking, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement, cannot be measured in terms of how much money they have given or how many Vedanta centres have grown up worldwide. We have to remember that our friends in the West, especially in the USA and England, helped and supported Swami Vivekananda, the architect of the Ramakrishna Mission, in that great hour of need when there were not too many to listen to him even in India, his motherland. Can we forget Mr. and Mrs. Hale and their daughters? Can we forget Prof. Wright, the Leggett family, Miss MacLeod, Lewis James, Mrs. J. Bagley, Sara Bull, Ms. Waldo, or Mrs. Dutcher? Can we forget Goodwin, Henrietta Müller, Mr. and Mrs. Sevier? No. There are also others who will live in our memory as long as the name of Vivekananda will remain in our mind. In appreciation of these Western admirers, Swami Gambhirananda writes:

> The Americans were not only his friends, admirers and disciples, but he addressed some of them as 'Mother', some as 'Father', while others were his sisters and brothers, just in the Indian way and with the same depth of feeling. They too reciprocated the sentiments, thus greatly helping him in his work, adding to his mental composure and providing a smooth vehicle for the transmission of his ideas.[42]

Not only that, the members of these families served Swamiji and later some of his brother disciples, such as Swamis Turiyananda, Abhedananda, and Saradananda, in various ways.

In February 1896 Swamiji made Mr. Francis Leggett President of the Vedanta Society of New York and other disciples its office-bearers. Miss Waldo taught the practice and philosophy of Raja Yoga during Swamiji's second trip to London. When the work in New York was placed on a sound footing, it was Miss Henrietta Müller who invited Swamiji to London 'as a missionary of Hinduism' and be her guest. It was she also who contributed thirty-nine thousand rupees for purchasing about seven acres of land for Belur Math. The land was bought on 4 March 1898. Mr. E. T. Sturdy too invited Swamiji to stay with him. Later, when Swami Abhedananda went to New York in 1897, Sturdy supervised the London work for some time.

Mrs Ole Bull also made a handsome contribution, several thousand dollars, according to Miss MacLeod, for the construction of the shrine of the newly founded Belur Math and which 'also enabled Swami Vivekananda to make an endowment for the monastery.' She also helped Sister Nivedita School from the very beginning. When Sara Bull died in 1911, the school faced a great financial crisis. However, by this time an Indian friend of the Mission and Mr. E. G. Thorp of Boston came forward to help the School financially.

In 1899, the *Udbodhan*, the first Bengali mouthpiece of the Math and Mission, was published as a fortnightly. Swami Trigunatitananda became its editor. But the money came from Miss MacLeod. 'I having very little', writes MacLeod, 'it took me some years to have eight hundred dollars. One day I said to Swamiji, "Here is a little money you may be able to use." He said, "What? What?" I said, "Yes". "How much?" he asked. And I said, "Eight hundred dollars". Instantly he turned to Swami Trigunatita and said, "There go and buy your press." He bought the press which started the *Udbodhan*, the

Bengali magazine published by the Ramakrishna Mission.'[43] Not only did she help with money, MacLeod also worked for nearly 50 years to preach Swamiji's Vedantic message in the West. Her debt, indeed, can never be repaid.

Goodwin and Mr. and Mrs. Sevier were the other three who greatly helped Swami Vivekananda's work. To Goodwin we are ever indebted for preserving Swamiji's lectures in the West. Swamiji himself in his 'Requiescat in Pace', a poem written in memory of J. J. Goodwin in August 1898, says, 'Thy service true, complete thy sacrifice....'

Captain Sevier and his wife came to India with Swamiji in 1897. They wanted to help Swamiji in his work. Their turn came in 1898 when they were with Swamiji at Almora. There Swamiji got the news of the premature death of Rajam Iyer, the editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, in May 1898. After Iyer's death the magazine ceased publication with the July issue. Now Swamiji said: 'Sevier, you said you would work for the good of India. The climate of Bengal will not suit you. So why don't you stay somewhere near Almora and undertake to conduct *Prabuddha Bharata*?'[44] Sevier agreed and started searching for a place where a monastery could be set up and where the Western disciples and the monks of the Ramakrishna Order could practise Advaita in all its purity. At last a place was selected at Mayavati, where the present Advaita Ashrama started functioning on 19 March 1899. The *Prabuddha Bharata* office was also transferred there and the journal resumed its publication. Capt. Sevier died at Mayavati on 28 October 1900 when Swamiji was in Cairo. Later he said, 'He [Sevier] was a martyr to the cause.' After the passing away of her husband, Mrs. Sevier continued to stay in a separate house at Mayavati and whole-heartedly served the monks and participated in the publication work of the Ashrama. She was one of the Trustees of the Advaita Ashrama. According to Swami Shraddhananda, Mother Sevier, along with Swami Virajananda, took very active part in editing *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*[45] and his life, later published as the *Life of Swami Vivekananda*. Swami Shraddhananda informs us that an American writer and devotee of Swamiji, Francis John Alexander, also helped Swami Virajananda in writing *The Life*.[46] To Mother Sevier also goes the credit of providing financial assistance to Swami Virajananda for setting up an ashrama at Shyamlatal in 1915. Always a friend of the poor, Mrs Sevier left for England in 1916 and died there in 1930 at the age of 83.

We must also remember the contributions of a few other Western devotees such as Miss Minnie C. Boock, who offered Swamiji a hundred and sixty acres of land in San Antonio Valley for a retreat. On this came up 'Shanti Ashrama' later when Swami Turiyananda was in California in 1900. Miss Mary Morton, an American student of Swami Bodhananda, donated forty thousand dollars, and that money helped the Swami to shift the Vedanta Society of New York to its permanent house at 34 West 71st Street in 1915. In 1946 Mrs Carrie Mead Wycoff (Sister Lalita) donated her house on Ivar Avenue in Hollywood to set up a Vedanta Society. The Gretz centre near Paris was actualized by the generous gift of property from a lady devotee in March 1948. Mrs Rasalia Abreu gave the necessary funds for the building of a centre in Boston in 1941. Last, but not the least, we should remember the great contribution made by Miss Helen F. Rubel (Bhakti) who met by far the largest portion of the expenditure for the newly constructed Sri Ramakrishna temple at Belur.

The Vedanta centres outside India are generally Math centres. There are also Mission centres in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Mauritius, Switzerland, and France. Each Mission centre, whether in India or abroad, is an independent, self-sustaining unit governed by the monks in cooperation with its lay members and devotees. Outside India the monks are guest teachers rather than missionaries and they are maintained by the members. As in the past, so in the present, each centre runs smoothly with the help and labour of love of the dedicated lay devotees and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. It is doubtful whether the phenomenal success story of the Mission would have been possible without their support and cooperation.

In conclusion I would like to say that, as this is a vast subject, I do not claim to have mentioned the contributions made by all the lay devotees and admirers to the Mission of Sri Ramakrishna. That is not possible because we can only count some of the big waves of a sea that are visible within a given frame. We cannot count the drops of water that are behind each wave. But all the same, they are there like bodies of unidentified ordinary soldiers in a great theatre of war. In the following section, 'Historical Perspectives', has been presented a broad view of the Ramakrishna Movement, from its genesis to the present times, in which the part played by the important torch bearers has

been highlighted. Nevertheless, let us offer our tribute to the front-ranking devotees as well as to the unknown and unsung heroes of the Ramakrishna Movement, which, after having successfully played its role in the last century, has stepped into the 21st century with a stronger sense of commitment towards its ideal — 'For one's own liberation and for the good of all.'

References

[1] Here too Sri Ramakrishna made his revolutionary contribution by combining renunciation with *sevā-dharma*, or the ideal of service.

[2] See *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math], I: 47-48. Hereafter *Gospel*.

[3] That the householder devotees are also a part of the sangha was underlined by Swami Saradananda at the First Convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1926. The same idea was reiterated by Swami Vireswarananda at the Second Convention held in 1980.

[4] Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983], 24. Hereafter *History*.

[5] The official history of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission also testifies to this fact. Swami Gambhirananda wrote, '...the Master...united them at Dakshineswar, Shyampukur and Cossipore....' *History*, 39.

[6] 'In the early days...there was no distinction between the Math and the Mission, and the terms were used indiscriminately' (Ibid., 148). Though it was, of course, clear from the beginning that the Math would be 'contemplative' in character, while the Mission would be 'socially active', it was evident later that the difference was somewhat blurred as both were involved in almost the same kinds of activities.

[7] The rules of the Math framed by Swami Vivekananda clearly emphasize this point. See Swami Shraddhananda, *Atiter Smriti* [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office].

[8] Swami Gambhirananda, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika* [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office], 428. Hereafter *Bhaktamalika*.

[9] Quoted by Swami Gambhirananda in *Bhaktamalika*, 312.

[10] Ibid., 326.

[11] Ibid., 307.

[12] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati Memorial Edition], VI: 342. Hereafter *Complete Works*.

[13] Swami Saradananda, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* [Calcutta; Udbodhan Office], Gurubhava, Uttarardha, 277-78. Also, *The Life of the Holy Mother*, [Madras], 64.

[14] *Gospel*, II: 975.

[15] *Complete Works*, VII: 248-49.

[16] *Gospel*, II: 976.

[17] *Complete Works*, VI: 240.

[18] Sri M, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita*, I: 223.

[19] *Complete Works*, V: 140.

[20] Ibid., VIII: 353.

[21] Ibid., 420.

[22] Ibid., 436.

[23] Ibid., VI: 334.

[24] *Bhaktamalika*, 267.

[25] Ibid.

[26] *Complete Works*, VI: 342.

[27] *Bhaktamalika*, 402.

[28] Ibid., 379.

[29] His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 5th ed.], II: 217. This mentions that Swamiji reached Calcutta on Friday, February 19, 1897. But Swami Gambhirananda wrote, 'Swamiji reached Calcutta on February 20, 1897.' See *History*, 92.

[30] His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 3rd ed.], 316-17. Hereafter *Reminiscences*.

[31] *Bhaktamalika*, 383.

[32] Ibid., 458.

[33] *Complete Works*, VI: 406.

[34] *History*, 95-96.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 235.

[37] Ibid., 148-49.

[38] *Reminiscences*, 71.

[39] *History*, 189.

[40] Ibid., 92.

[41] Ibid., 137.

[42] Ibid., 74-75.

[43] *Reminiscences*, 237.

[44] *History*, 102.

[45] *Atiter Smriti*, 164-65.

[46] Ibid., see also, footnote, 190.

Echoes of the Past

PROPHETIC UTTERANCES OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS APOSTLES

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

Sri Ramakrishna

ONE DAY AT DAKSHINESWAR when Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room, he talked about three salient disciplines of the Vaishnava religion: love of God's name, compassion for all living beings, and service to the devotees. Repeating the word 'compassion' he went into samādhi. After a while he returned to normal consciousness and said to the devotees: 'How foolish to speak of compassion! Man is an insignificant worm crawling on the earth — and he is to show compassion to others! This is absurd. It must not be compassion, but service to all. Recognize them as God's manifestations and serve them.' Only Narendra understood the implication of the Master's words.

Coming out of the room, Narendra said to the others: 'What a wonderful light I have discovered in those words of the Master! How beautifully he has reconciled the ideal of *bhakti* with the knowledge of Vedanta, generally interpreted as dry, austere, and incompatible with human sentiments! What a grand, natural, and sweet synthesis!.... Those following the paths of *karma* [action] and *yoga* [contemplation] are similarly benefitted by these words of the Master. The embodied being cannot remain even for a minute without activity. All his activities should be directed to the service of man, the manifestation of God upon earth, and this will accelerate his progress towards the

goal. If it be the will of God, I shall one day proclaim this noble truth before the world at large. I shall make it the common property of all — the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, the brahmin and the pariah.'[1]

'Know that the many Harisabhas and the other religious institutions you see are due to this [referring to his own person]. Did they formerly exist? Everything had been lifeless, but since this [referring to his person again] came, all these have come to life again and a current of religion is now flowing just a little below the surface.'[2]

'You see, the Mother has shown and convinced me that there are many devotees of mine, who are to form an inner circle. They will come and hear and know of God from here [referring to himself] and will have direct knowledge of Him, realize Him, and be blessed with divine love and knowledge. The Mother will sport in various ways with this case [that is, his body] and will do good to many. That is why She has not broken the case but has kept it on.'[3]

[*On another occasion when Narendra said that his goal in life was to remain immersed in samādhi, Sri Ramakrishna said to him*]: 'Shame on you! You are asking for such an insignificant thing [samādhi]. I thought that you would be like a big banyan tree, and that thousands of people would rest in your shade. But now I see that you are seeking your own liberation.'[4]

[*Pointing to his young disciples, the Master said to Narendra*]: 'I leave them in your care. Love them intensely and see that they practise spiritual disciplines even after my death, and that they do not return home.'[5]

Only a few days before the final departure, Sri Ramakrishna called Narendra to his side and wrote on a piece of paper, 'Naren will teach others.' Narendra protested, 'I won't do any such thing.' Thereupon Sri Ramakrishna said with loving authority, 'Your very bones will do it.'[6]

[*One day Sri Ramakrishna transmitted his spiritual power to Narendra by steadfastly looking at him. Narendra felt as though a subtle force like an electric shock were entering into his body. Sri Ramakrishna said*]: 'Today I have given you my all and have become a fakir. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that will you go where you came from.'[7]

[*In Cossipore the senior Gopal bought twelve pieces of cloth and twelve rosaries of rudraksha beads to distribute among the monks. He dyed the cloths*

in the ochre colour himself. When the Master heard about it, he said to Gopal]: 'You will attain a thousand times more virtue if you present those ochre cloths and rosaries to my children rather than giving them to the monks of Jagannath ghat. Where else will you find such all-renouncing monks? Each of them is equal to a thousand monks.'[8]

Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

[*In 1890 Holy Mother visited Bodh Gaya. There she noticed how comfortably the members of a local monastery lived, with all their physical wants supplied.... She recalled*]: 'Ah, how much I wept, how often I prayed to the Master! That is why you see all these monasteries established by his grace. Immediately after his passing away, the children renounced the world and sought out a temporary shelter. But soon after, they began to wander about independently. I felt very sad and prayed to the Master: "Oh Master, you came down to earth, had fun with a few companions, and then departed in a happy mood. Was that the end of everything? If so, what was the need of assuming a human body and going through all this suffering? I have seen many sadhus at Varanasi and Vrindavan who live on alms and seek shelter under trees. There is no dearth of sadhus like them. I cannot bear the sight of my children, who have renounced everything in your name, going from door to door for a morsel of food. I fervently pray to you that those who give up the world in your name may not lack simple food and clothes. Let them live together, with you and your teachings as their centre. Those who are afflicted with the sorrows of the world will come to them and obtain peace by listening to your teachings. That is the purpose of your advent, isn't it so? I cannot control myself when I see them drifting about helplessly." Afterwards Naren slowly organized all this.'[9]

'Love alone is the essential thing. Our organization is growing only through love. I am their mother.... They are my children and have taken shelter with Sri Ramakrishna. Wherever they go the Master will look after them.'[10]

When somebody asked Holy Mother about the activities of Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi, she remarked: 'I saw the Master himself present there; that is why all this work is going on. It is all His work.'[11]

Swami Vivekananda

'India must listen to me! I shall shake India to her foundations. I shall send an electric thrill through her national veins.'[12]

'To organize or not to organize? If I organize, the spirit will diminish. If I do not organize, the message will not spread.'[13]

'This Math [monastery] is established to work out one's own liberation, and to train oneself to do good to the world in every way, along the lines laid down by Sri Bhagavan Ramakrishna.... For want of learning, religious orders become degraded. Therefore learning should always be cultivated. In the absence of renunciation and austerity, luxury takes possession of the organization; hence the spirit of renunciation and austerity should always be kept bright. Propagation of its ideas keeps the vitality of the Order strong. Henceforth you should never cease from preaching work.'[14]

[*On 9 December 1898 Belur Math was formally consecrated when Vivekananda installed the Master's relics in the shrine. Swamiji carried the casket of relics on his own shoulder, and on his way he said to a disciple*]: 'The Master once told me, "I will go and live wherever you take me, carrying me on your shoulder, be it under a tree or in the humblest cottage." With faith in that gracious promise I myself am now carrying him to the site of our future Math. Know for certain, my boy, that so long as his name inspires his followers with the ideal of purity, holiness, and charity for all men, even so long shall he, the Master, sanctify this place with his presence.

'It will be a centre in which will be recognized and practised a grand harmony of all creeds and faiths, as exemplified in the life of Shri Ramakrishna; and only ideas of religion in its universal aspect will be preached. From this centre of universal toleration will go forth the shining message of goodwill and peace and harmony to deluge the whole world.'[15]

'The spiritual impact that has come here to Belur will last fifteen hundred years — and this will be a great university. Do not think I imagine it, I see it.'[16]

'Here — here [*pointing to the Belur Monastery*], I have left all my spiritual gems and jewels, you [monks] preserve them carefully. You just look after them. Those who will work with these treasures, they are coming — coming from a distant place. They will come after five or six generations. They will

enjoy these spiritual treasures. Please preserve them. I sang only the *āgamaṇi* [a special song related to the advent of Mother Uma]; you preserve my message.'[17]

'Listen, Sri Ramakrishna came for the good of this world and gave his life for all human beings. I am also sacrificing my life for them, and all of you will have to do the same. Whatever you see at present [in Ramakrishna Mission] is just the beginning. As I shed the blood of my heart, know for certain that it will produce great heroes, and many lion-hearted souls will work for the Lord, and they will overturn the world in future.'[18]

'This Math that we are building will harmonize all creeds, all standpoints. Just as Sri Ramakrishna held highly liberal views, this Math, too, will be a centre for propagating similar ideas. The blazing light of universal harmony that will emanate from here will flood the whole world.'

'The capable sannyāsin children of Sri Ramakrishna, the teacher of the great synthesis of religions, will be honoured everywhere as the teachers of men.... The real self-sacrificing sannyāsins of the Math will be the centre of the preservation and spread of religious ideas.... One spray from the full ocean of his spirituality, if realized, will make gods of men. Such a synthesis of universal ideas you will not find in the history of the world again.'[19]

'To work with undaunted energy! What fear! Who is powerful enough to thwart you! We will crush the stars to atoms, and unhinge the universe. Don't you know who we are? We are the servants of Sri Ramakrishna.'[20]

Swami Brahmananda

'Swamiji uttered these Rules of the Order not from the physical plane; he raised his mind to a higher realm and then gave dictation and Tarak-da [Swami Shivananda] wrote them down. He gave these Rules with a view to spreading the ideas and ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and for the good of humanity. Everyone, whether man or woman, rich or poor, high or low, has an equal right to the spiritual heritage and service of Sri Ramakrishna. Blessed is he who serves the Master and follows his teachings! Accept those instructions of Swamiji with candid faith; practise them in your lives and then spread them in all directions. As a result you will see that the evil influence of the Dark Age will diminish and the Golden Age will come in sight.'[21]

'This Belur Math is like Kailash [the abode of Shiva]. Here the guru and the Ganges are present. Swamiji also left his body here. This is Vaikuntha [the abode of Vishnu].... Tarak-da, I shall never be able to cut my attachment for Belur Math. Even after my death I shall watch Belur Math from above.'[22]

Swami Shivananda

'From my little experience I tell you, children of Sri Ramakrishna, that our organization lasts as long as the spirit of God pervades its atmosphere. Love, catholicity, purity, and selflessness are the cornerstones of our organization. No man-made laws can save it from ruin when selfishness eats into its vitals. If you all try to become perfect — keeping intact your allegiance to this Math, which gives you every kind of facility for reaching that perfection — you will add a leaf to the life of the organization. Swamiji shed his blood for the Math. His spirit is still hovering over us. This Math is the visible body of Sri Ramakrishna. All those that have gone before us are still with us in spirit to help us in all possible ways. We must unfurl all sails so that we may take advantage of the divine wind that is ever blowing to take us to the destined goal.'[23]

'The more there are trials, tribulations, and adversities, the more the power of the Master's Order [*sangha-shakti*] will be roused. All great achievements have to pass through many obstacles. The more we face opposition and adversity the more our love, faith, and reliance on the Master will increase. This organization came into existence to set into motion the religion of the age [*yuga-dharma*], and it is the Master who is working through each individual belonging to it. The activities of the Ramakrishna Mission will continue to progress for centuries; no one will be able to resist its course. These are the words of Swamiji himself, who was a *rishi* seeing the past, present, and future.'[24]

'...we are working in our own way in accordance with our own ideal — an ideal formulated and left for us by the far-sighted sage Swami Vivekananda. Before his illumined vision was revealed the picture of the next thousand years — not merely of India but of the entire world. He saw everything clearly and chalked out a definite policy for us to follow.... The regeneration of India is absolutely certain.... Compared with her future achievement,

her glorious past will pale into insignificance. Then you will realize why the Master and Swamiji came and how much they contributed to the well-being of India. What can the limited mind of man understand about the doings of those divine beings? Don't you see that they have awakened the national *kundalini* of India?'[25]

'The love, affection, and respect which the members of the Order feel for one another constitute the life force of this organization.... After leaving the gross body, the Master now lives in this sangha.... It is to save all...that he came down as Sri Ramakrishna.'[26]

Swami Premananda

'Elephants have two sets of teeth: one outside — the tusks — and another inside, to chew food. The activities of our Mission are like the elephant's tusks. Whatever work you may do — managing hospitals or conducting relief work — unless you have character, all will be in vain. What is wanted is character, purity, steadfast devotion to God. If you have them, you will prosper, otherwise you will totally fail.'

[*To the lay members*]: 'It is no good being only members of the Mission. You must build up your own character, you must make the whole world your own through love, so that people may find inspiration from your selflessness, renunciation, and purity. You must drive away all egotism and pride from your heart and consider yourselves as servants of the Lord and thus serve humanity.'

'Our Master never sought name and fame, and so they have come to him in profusion. Swamiji often said in his later life that he was disgusted with name and fame. Be you all men of character. Grow into gods. Only then will the work of the Mission prosper. This is my earnest prayer to you all.'[27]

'Don't think we are forming a sect in the name of Sri Ramakrishna. You will fall as soon as you introduce sectarianism in the Ramakrishna Mission. Non-sectarianism does not mean indifference to your ideal. Let the Hindus, Muslims, and Christians come to our monastery; I am ready to embrace them all and make them my own. To love all beings is the basis of the Ramakrishna Mission.'[28]

Swami Adbhutananda

'One day [after the inauguration of the Ramakrishna Mission on 1 May 1897] I said to Brother Loren: "Brother, why have you started all these activities? Won't these interfere with our meditation and prayer?"

'Swamiji smiled at me and said: "How would you understand why I am introducing all this work? You are a dumb-bell. At the sight of *ka* you shed tears like Prahlada. You are all *bhaktas* [devotees]. What do you understand of this? You can only whine like babies. You think you can attain salvation through crying, that on the last day the Master will come to take you to heaven, and there you will enjoy to your heart's content! And those who are studying the scriptures for knowledge, who are working to educate people in the path of righteousness and serve the diseased and distressed, will all go to hell because all these works are maya. What a grand idea — that to do good to mankind is an unnecessary bother and that one cannot attain God through these troublesome activities. This is your view, isn't it? As if God-realization were very easy — you call on God and here he comes! Does God appear before the man who merely places his picture on an altar and throws a few flowers before him? Tell me that."

'I was dumbfounded. Another brother disciple lisped a few words in continuation of my thought and got a cutting snub. Swamiji continued: "Ah, what you call devotion is sentimental nonsense that only weakens a man. Who cares for that kind of devotion? I have no faith in devotion which makes a man so self-centred, so busy with his own personal salvation, that his heart will not go out to others. I am ready to go to hell a thousand times to make a genuine man, yet I would not want to go to heaven through the door of devotion such as yours. I don't care for that type of salvation. If your Ramakrishna teaches such a doctrine, I am not prepared to hear him. Make a note of that! You know, one day I foolishly asked the Master for this kind of devotion and salvation, and he rebuked me and called me selfish and small-minded. Should I be misled by your words? I will work as he has told me. He who is ready to cast away the very idea of personal salvation to work for the good of others, know that I am his bondsman."

'Brother Vivekananda burst into tears and left the room. Then we felt very sorry. Why did we argue with him? The Master made him our leader. Our duty is to follow him.

'The next day when I found him alone I told him: "Brother, I am a fool. Please don't take my words to heart."'[29]

Swami Yogananda

[*Regarding the advent of Sri Ramakrishna*]: 'There have always been various religious paths, countless scriptures, and holy places in every country. In spite of that why is there a decline in religion? Because in the course of time all ideals become lost. Therefore God incarnates Himself to explain the hidden mystery of religion and to show the ideal.... By the grace of the Master I have attained so much knowledge and devotion that I am unable to express it all.'[30]

Swami Saradananda

'The Master came to make religion easy. People were being crushed under the weight of rules and regulations. To repeat the Lord's name or to worship Him, no special time and place is necessary. In whatever condition one may be, one can take His name. The Master never gave too much importance to these external observances. As to means, adopt whichever suits you best. If you like God with form, that will also lead you to the goal. If you like God without form, well and good; stick to it and you will progress. If you doubt His very existence, then better put the question to Him thus: "I do not know whether you exist or not, whether you are formless or have form. Do please grant that I may know your real nature."'[31]

'Remember, the ideal and revelation that had been manifested through Sri Ramakrishna and voiced forth through Swami Vivekananda came as a divine dispensation for the present age and it is our solemn duty to realize them in our individual lives and instil them into others.'[32]

'The Ramakrishna Order, to promote its spiritual culture and realize the doctrines of the time-honoured Vedanta philosophy, has engaged itself since the very inception to serve the Lord by serving humanity with the best of its might, remembering the imperative scriptural injunction to look upon man as nothing less than the Deity Himself [*Jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ*].... Therefore, it will be readily understood that the Ramakrishna Mission has nothing to do whatsoever with any kind of political movement.'[33]

Swami Ramakrishnananda

'In the beginning we had no thought of mission. We believed that all we had to do was to realize the ideal the Master had set before us, which meant living and serving humbly.'[34]

'Whatever the Master makes me speak, I speak like a gramophone. I don't claim any personal credit from it.... Do you think it is we who are preaching his wonderful life and message? Far from it. The Master himself is doing it in mysterious ways. Wherever we go to preach about him we find that the field is already prepared. Some are blessed by him in dreams; some get spiritual initiation directly from him; some are attracted by the quality of his teachings, which clothe the highest truth in simple language and parables; and some are inspired by seeing and hearing his disciples.'[35]

'Sri Ramakrishna, the divine incarnation of this age, realized and preached the harmony of religions. Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, and other world teachers — each proclaimed that the religion taught by him is the only way to salvation. The difference between Sri Ramakrishna and other prophets is that he himself preached no new religion, but practised all religions in his life and experienced the universal truth underlying them all. His message can be summed up in the sentence: "As many faiths, so many paths."'[36]

Swami Abhedananda

'The mission of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was to show by his living example how a truly spiritual man, being dead to the world of senses, can live on the plane of God-consciousness; it was to prove that each individual soul is immortal and potentially divine.

'For the first time it was demonstrated that all religions were like so many paths leading to the same goal, that the realization of the same Almighty Being is the highest ideal of Christianity, Mohammedanism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, as well as of all other religions of the world. Sri Ramakrishna's mission was to proclaim the eternal truth that God is one but has many aspects, and that the same one God is worshipped by different nations under various names and forms; that He is personal, impersonal, and beyond both; that He is with name and form and yet nameless and formless.

'His mission was to establish the worship of the Divine Mother and thus to elevate the ideal of womanhood into Divine Motherhood. His mission was to show by his own example that true spirituality can be transmitted and that salvation can be obtained through the grace of a Divine Incarnation. His mission was to declare before the world that psychic powers and the power of healing are obstacles in the path of the attainment of God-consciousness.

'The days of prophecy have passed before our eyes. The manifestations of the Divine powers of one who is worshipped today by thousands as the latest Incarnation of Divinity, we have witnessed with our eyes. Blessed are they who have seen him and touched his holy feet. May the glory of Sri Ramakrishna be felt by all nations of the earth, may his Divine power be manifested in the earnest and sincere souls of his devotees of all countries in all ages to come, is the prayer of his spiritual child and servant.'[37]

Swami Turiyananda

'It is not so easy to speak about Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy. It seems to me that to encourage the followers of all religions, he declared, "As many faiths, so many paths." He made this statement after he himself had practised the disciplines of various religious paths and experienced that their paths lead to the same Truth.... Therefore, Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy is: In whatever way and at any cost we must attain God.... Once you attain God, it does not matter which doctrine your temperament bids you to uphold. Liberation is assured when you know Him.'[38]

'Those who profess to be the children of Sri Ramakrishna must have *yoga*, *bhakti*, *karma*, *jñāna*, nay, everything. For, Sri Ramakrishna stands for the synthesis and harmony of all religious paths. The spiritual growth of a person following a particular line was the rule in the past. But now one should have an all round development combined with magnanimity of heart to tolerate others.'[39]

Swami Akhandananda

'Sri Ramakrishna one day cried aloud from the house-top for those young enthusiasts who were to come to him and pour forth their life's offerings on

the altar of his service, and they came. But that cry has not ended there; it is still ringing through the air and shall continue for aeons. Many have come after that, many are still coming, and many more will come in future....

'Remember what high hopes Swamiji cherished of you — the youth of the country. You fairest jasmines on earth, bring all that whiteness and fragrance you have and lay them on the altar of Sri Ramakrishna — of Humanity. All that is wanted of you today is that genuine feeling, that love and sympathy for the poor and the downtrodden which Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had in their heart of hearts....

'Read Swami Vivekananda's works and you will find them replete all through with this one behest to us — sacrifice the lesser for the greater; make your life an offering for the service of humanity and above all, of the poor and ignorant of the country. It was to give effect to this cherished desire of his life that he inaugurated this movement known as the Ramakrishna Mission.'[40]

'Our Master is living and moving in all as Narayana [God]. The seed of this *Religion of Service* was in him. Therefore you now see the tree and its branches. At Deoghar he said to Mathur Babu: "Feed these poor people, give them clothing and oil [for anointing their heads in the scorching heat], or else I will not proceed to Varanasi [for pilgrimage]." That is how the wheel of this *Religion of Service* for this age started rolling.'[41]

Swami Vijnanananda

'Sri Ramakrishna came to demonstrate the harmony of religions. Swamiji said, "There should be a rule in our rule book that no one should criticize any religion or any followers of other religions."'[42]

Swami Subodhananda

'Sometimes the Master would say, "The Divine Mother herself has come to visit the world in human form [*meaning himself*]; when people of all sects assemble here, this body will not last."'

'One day while walking in the Panchavati at Dakshineswar, the Master went into ecstasy. Then, facing the northwest, he pointed to himself and said, "Look, the Mother is saying that the more a person thinks of me, the more

quickly he will understand the highest truths of religion." Again, pointing to the northwest, he said, "I shall be born again in that direction, then many people will attain knowledge."'

'On another occasion the Master told me about himself: "This body is a cage of flesh and bone, but the Mother is playing inside it.... He who was Rama and Krishna is living in this body."

'It is better to live on rice and spinach at Belur Math than to have good food somewhere else.

'My last prayer is that the blessings of the Master be always on the Order.'[43]

Swami Trigunatitananda

'All the prophets, sages, and incarnations of God are nothing else but messengers to bring the message from Heaven. Ramakrishna could explain beautifully that there is or can be not one messenger only, not one path only, not one incarnation of God, but many, so that the different types of minds could be satisfied.'[44]

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PART II

Historical Perspectives

The Genesis of Ramakrishna Mission

SWAMI MUMUKSHANANDA

1

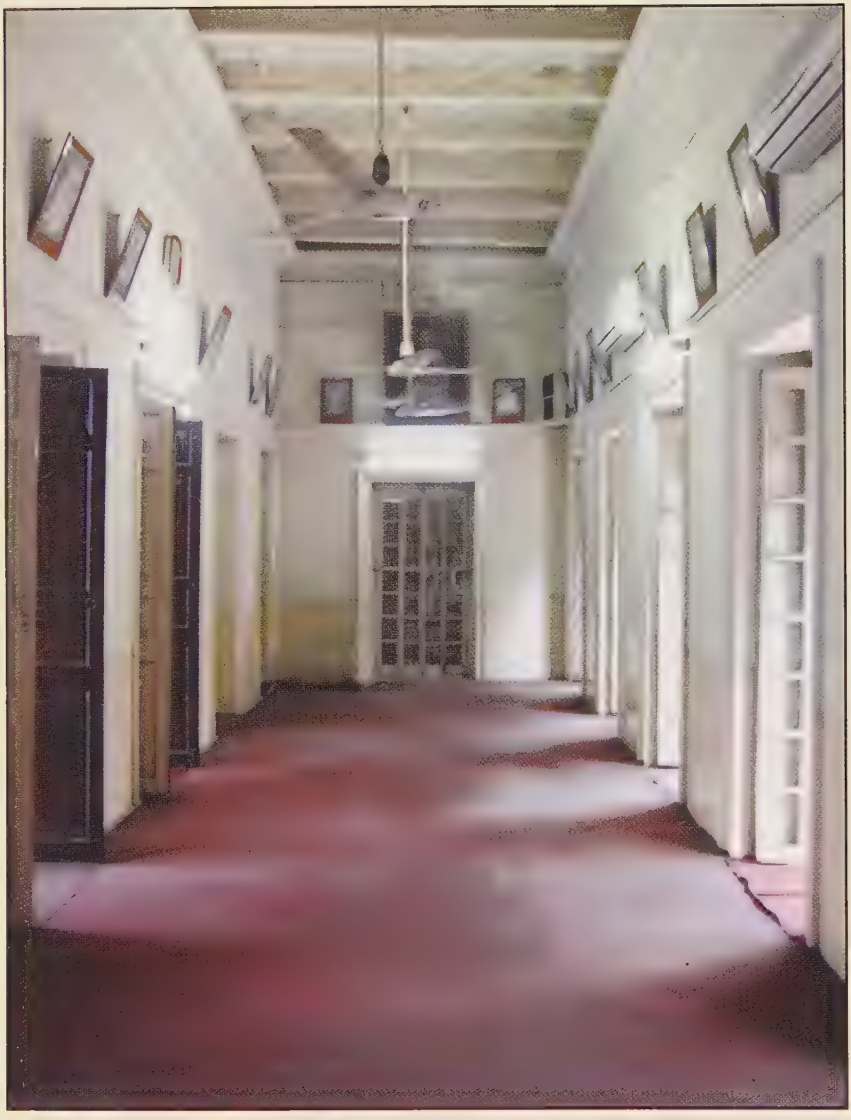
The inauguration of the Ramakrishna Mission was held in May 1897, but its genesis (i.e., the circumstances, the ideas, and the thoughts that led to this inauguration) along with the genesis of the Ramakrishna Math can be traced to a much earlier period, the period of the sādhanā of Sri Ramakrishna in the 1850s —

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION as a religious organization was formally established in Calcutta on 1 May 1897 by the lay and monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, jointly, under the initiative of Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna Math (or Baranagore Math as it was called at that time) had been established earlier (in late September 1886, i.e. within two months of the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna) by the monastic disciples of the Master, headed by Swami Vivekananda, in pursuance of the instructions of Sri Ramakrishna himself. After starting this Math, Swami Vivekananda began to feel the need of another organization which would be run on the same lines as the former, but would stress spiritual, mental, and material service to all — in and outside India.

While in the West, Swami Vivekananda was impressed by the benefits of organization and organized activities he saw there, and his intention to have a second organization was strengthened. Shortly after his return to Calcutta from

the West he had to go to Darjiling to recuperate his shattered health. He took with him Swami Brahmananda and a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Girish Chandra Ghosh, for consultation on the shape of the organization to be formed. Returning to Calcutta he called a representative meeting of all the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna[1] at the house of Balaram Bose, an ardent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, on 1 May 1897. His proposal for the establishment of a new organization was unanimously supported. Consequently the organization under the appellation of 'Ramakrishna Mission Association' was inaugurated[2] with both householders and sannyāsins as its members and office-bearers. This inauguration of the organization has to be distinguished from its genesis or origin in the true sense of the term. As it is commonly seen in human history, before the formal and official opening of any great institution, its founders and originators had to do a good deal of deep and serious thinking on the ideals, objectives, and the basic principles of the institution to be established. In fact, they had to become fully imbued with these thoughts before they could be implemented. This conception of lofty ideas in the minds of some courageous persons (or person) of sincere motivation and lofty character is the real genesis of any great organization. The sprouting of a seed into shoots is preceded by a long process consisting of the formation of a seed in the mother-tree, its careful preservation, planting the seed in properly prepared soil, and nourishing it with proper amounts of water, air, light, and manure. These preceding steps, and not their end-product — the shooting forth of branches — indicate the real genesis of the plant. Similar is the case with the genesis of the organization which came to be called the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.

It must also be borne in mind that the genesis of these two organizations has to be studied jointly, and not separately, since from the very start they both have been inseparably interlinked, and both stemmed from the same source, the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna. The ideals of both these organizations are like the 'two facets of the same coin'.[3] The programmes of activities of both are controlled and supervised by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order who are dedicated to the same ideals. To discuss the genesis of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, we shall first have to discuss *ipso facto* the genesis of the Ramakrishna Order which is the source of the twin organizations.



Balaram Mandir — The room where Ramakrishna Mission Association was formed by Swami Vivekananda on 1 May 1897

Dakshineswar Kali Temple

Panchavati

Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar

II

The genesis of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission lies in the spiritual practices, realizations and revelations of Sri Ramakrishna and the spiritual traditions of India as revived by him —

When we look at the historic religious organizations of the world, we find that they had their genesis in the lives and spiritual revelations of the world teachers of spirituality. These great teachers all went through a period of intense *sādhanā* to intuitively realize the ultimate Reality and a gamut of truths concerning spiritual life. Then they felt deep within their heart a stirring inspiration or a divine command to preach what they had realized to alleviate humanity's suffering caused by spiritual ignorance. It is said that Buddha after his enlightenment was asked by Brahma to preach his new doctrine for the benefit of the afflicted; the Bible speaks of Jesus Christ's anointment to preach to the poor (humble); Hazarat Mohammed was asked in a vision by Gabriel, an angel of God, to bring God's message to his people; and Guru Nanak got a divine instruction to preach to the people the name of God. At the next stage, ardent, sincere, and able followers gathered round these world teachers and dedicated their lives, heart and soul, to practise and propagate the teachings of their masters. This is in brief the story of the origin and early growth of the historic religious organizations. The genesis of the Ramakrishna Order does not seem to be an exception to this universal phenomenon.

The genesis of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission can be traced to Sri Ramakrishna's life of *sādhanā* and the spiritual realizations and revelations he experienced. The following facts in support of this contention may be cited:

1. The Trust Deed, and the Rules and Regulations of Ramakrishna Math, and also the aims and objects of the Ramakrishna Mission — as drawn up by Swami Vivekananda — clearly state that the practice and preaching of the ideas and ideals that had been illustrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna for working out one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world are the sole concern of these interlinked twin organizations.

On this point Swami Saradananda, one of the chief lieutenants of Swami Vivekananda, and the first Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, observed:

> The Mission [by which term he meant the Ramakrishna Math also] was started by Swami Vivekananda for spreading the religious ideal of Sri Ramakrishna by interpreting the scriptures in the light of the great Master's life and realizations and with his idea of service to humanity looking upon human beings as images of God, nay as God himself.[4]

2. When we study the ideology, i.e. the pivotal ideals and principles of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, we find that their source is the life of Sri Ramakrishna. To elaborate a little:

(a) Sri Ramakrishna used to say, and his life demonstrated the truth, that God-realization or Self-realization is the goal of life; that all activities of life should be so regulated by moral and spiritual principles so that they may conduce towards that *summum bonum*. But a truly God-centred life is necessarily a life of love and service to others. Sri Ramakrishna himself was love and service personified. His words, deeds, and thoughts showed that he was always concerned with the welfare of others. He even scolded Swami Vivekananda (then Narendra) for his desire to remain constantly absorbed in *nirvikalpa samādhi* and asked him to work for the removal of the world's misery. He entreated Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, also to continue to live after his own demise for doing good to suffering humanity. He used to advise spiritual aspirants both householders and monks to devote their lives not only to prayer, meditation, and repetition of God's name but also to the service of all beings, knowing that God resides in everybody's heart.[5] This is why members of the Ramakrishna Math or Ramakrishna Mission, following the pattern of Sri Ramakrishna's life, attempt to lead their lives for their own liberation and also for working for the welfare of others — *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca*.

(b) Again, the ideal of working for the welfare of the world actually means *jagat sevā*, or more correctly, *śiva-jñāne jīva sevā* (serving all beings, looking upon them as God), in the words of Sri Ramakrishna. One day in 1884 at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna went into samādhi while he was

engaged in spiritual talk. Presently he returned to partial normal consciousness and said to the devotees: 'Talk of compassion for beings! Insignificant creatures that you are, how can you show compassion to beings? Who are you to show compassion? You wretch, who are you to bestow it? No, no, it is not compassion to jīvas, but service to them as Shiva.'[6] Here we find the genesis of the concept of service of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. All the material, mental, and spiritual programmes of service of the Math and Mission are based on this concept first articulated and practised by Sri Ramakrishna himself. Of course, it was left to Swami Vivekananda's genius to bring out the wider and deeper implications of his Master's words and to make them practical through the establishment of the Math and Mission organizations.

(c) One unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna's life was that he realized God successively through different methods of *sādhanā* (Tantra, Vaishnava, Advaita Vedanta, etc.) of Hinduism, as well as the methods of Islam and Christianity. He found that all ways of *sādhanā*, all religions for that matter, are like so many paths leading to the same God, called by different names — God, Brahman, Allah, and so on. He said, 'As many faiths, so many paths', and pleaded with the followers of different religions to love and respect each other as fellow travellers to the same goal. So when Sri Ramakrishna was practising different religions at Dakshineswar and discovering for himself the same God in all religions, he was, as it were, laying the foundation for the edifice of the 'Harmony of Religions' — a cardinal principle of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

(d) When we study the life of Sri Ramakrishna, we find in him a wonderful harmonious combination of the four principal ways of *sādhanā*, or four yogas — *jñāna* (discrimination), *bhakti* (divine love or devotion), *dhyāna* (meditation), and *karma* (unselfish and God-dedicated action). In respect of *jñāna* he was like Sri Shankaracarya and Shukadeva; in respect of *bhakti* he could be compared with Sri Chaitanya and the Gopis; in respect of *dhyāna* he was like Buddha; and in respect of *karma* he was like Sri Krishna. He used to also advise his devotees to practise (i) the repetition of God's name and the singing of His glory (*bhakti*); (ii) meditation (*dhyāna*) in a corner of one's home or in a solitary place; (iii) constant discrimination (*jñāna* or *vicāra*) between the real (eternal) and the unreal, and (iv) discharging one's duties to all with one's mind fixed on God as a maid-servant does her duties at her

master's house (*karma-yoga*).[7] Because of this aspect of his life, we find that all Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission centres stress a harmonious combination of all the four principal yogas in their activities and ways of *sādhanā*. The emblem of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission highlights this harmony and synthesis of the yogas. So it is quite fair to say that when Sri Ramakrishna was practising these four yogas he was working at the genesis, the origin of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission's ideal of the synthesis and harmony of the four yogas.

Sri Ramakrishna's life was, as it were, all the age-old spiritual traditions of India condensed in one life, for he practised and verified for himself all that had been before, and thus re-established all the principal ways of *sādhanā* — such as the Shākta, the Vaishnava, the Dvaita and the Advaita, etc. Truly, Swami Vivekananda said of him, 'This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life and so raised himself to be the object-lesson for future generations.'[8] Romain Rolland remarked that he was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people.[9] Unlike the other spiritual organizations of the nineteenth century like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, or Prarthana Samaj (each of which represented only one aspect of the Indian spiritual tradition), the Ramakrishna Movement represents all the major aspects of Indian spirituality. It excludes none, but re-authenticates the veracity of all the spiritual traditions. So without any fear of contradiction it can be said that the ground of genesis of the ideas and ideals of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission is *the whole spiritual tradition of India as revived by Sri Ramakrishna in this modern age.*

III

The role of Sri Ramakrishna in the genesis of the organizational shape of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission — his divine revelation — bringing together and training his select disciples —

Not only has Sri Ramakrishna's life provided the ideology of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, but he also played the most active role in bringing into existence and giving organizational shape to the Ramakrishna Order —

the mother Institution of both the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. However, the 'active role' of Sri Ramakrishna should be understood in its proper sense.

Sri Ramakrishna never considered himself to be the doer or agent of any action, big or small. He perceived clearly that God, whom he used to call his Divine Mother, was the real doer or agent of all actions. He, and for that matter, all other persons or beings, were mere instruments in Her hand. In fact, when one studies the origin and the growth of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, one is constrained to believe that it is a case of divine origin in which Sri Ramakrishna played the most crucial and important part, but Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, and his brother disciples, both lay and monastic, also played their respective parts. Those who do not believe in the concept of 'divine origin' would perhaps say that through a strange turn of events the Ramakrishna Order built itself up. The world-famous historian, Mr. Arnold Toybee, in a meeting organized by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, London, once said:

> Ramakrishna's action was communion with God. It drew to him people of all ages, and a group of his young disciples headed by Swami Vivekananda became the first members of the religious Order that is holding this meeting here tonight. If I am right, Ramakrishna himself did not found this Order in any formal way. You might say that *it founded itself after his death through the continuing effects of his life on his disciples*, who had lived with him during his later years.[10]

During the period of his *sādhanā* Sri Ramakrishna experienced innumerable spiritual revelations, some of which had significant bearing on the genesis of the Ramakrishna Order. He once told Mathuranath Biswas, an ardent devotee and one of the proprietors of the Dakshineswar Kali temple:

> You see, the Mother has shown and convinced me that there are many devotees of mine, who are to form an inner circle. They will come and hear and know of God from here and will have direct knowledge of Him, realize Him, and be blessed with divine love and knowledge. The Mother will sport in various ways with this case [that is, his body] and will do good to many. That is why She has not broken the case but has kept it on.[11]

This may be treated as the first divine intimation about the Order that was to be formed in the future. The second divine intimation was precise and to the point. Swami Saradananda, an authentic biographer and commentator on Sri Ramakrishna's life, wrote that at the conclusion of the *sādhanā* period of his life, Sri Ramakrishna had certain spiritual revelations — one of which was that 'as an instrument in the hands of the Mother of the Universe, he would have to found a new communion especially fitted for the liberal faith revealed in his own life'.[12] It would not be wrong to assume that this holy communion of the Divine vision is the Ramakrishna Order and the greater Ramakrishna Movement of the later years.

We have already observed that Sri Ramakrishna's life was a life of constant communion with God. A divine child wholly dependent on the Mother, he was incapable of entertaining any thought other than the thought of the Mother. So he did not bother about what people were to come to him to form an inner circle of devotees, or how a communion was going to be established using him as its instrument. His attitude was that Mother does Her work Herself and that She knows well how and when the inner circle of devotees would come to do Her work.[13] But gradually the Mother showed him in a series of visions the many devotees that were to flock around him. She also enkindled in his heart a deep longing to meet them and to unburden his heart by talking with them and giving them freely the vast wealth of his spiritual realizations. Addressing his inner circle of devotees he would say in later years:

> I then felt an indescribable yearning to see you all. The soul was being wrung like a piece of wet towel, so to say, and I felt restless with pain. I felt like weeping. But I could not do so, lest that should create a scene; I controlled myself somehow. But when the day came to an end and night approached and *āratrika* music began in the Mother's and Vishnu's temples, I could no longer control myself, thinking, 'One more day has passed away and they have not come.' I then got up on the roof of the mansion and cried out, calling you loudly, 'O my children! Where are you? Come.' I felt I might go mad. Then, after long waiting, you at last started coming, one by one. Only then I felt consoled. And as I had seen you all earlier, I could recognize you as you came, one after another.[14]

Thus, under a divine plan, as it were, the would-be architects of the Ramakrishna Order gathered around their Master.

Sri Ramakrishna then started his work in two distinct ways. He began his spiritual ministration to the householder devotees, teaching them how to lead God-centred lives living with their families. Guided by an inner urge and in the light of his earlier vision of their extraordinary spiritual potentials, he also simultaneously started to train in a very special way the small group of young men, mostly in their teens, in order that they might first inherit the immense spiritual power the Divine Mother had placed in him and then use it for Mother's work, for the good of the many. He knew that these young boys — ultimately to become a group of sixteen — were to be his successors and the Mother's workers. While the devotees in general usually visited him on holidays, he would meet these boys — the 'unpecked fruits' for offering to the Lord — on other days of the week, when he could pay special personal attention to them undisturbed. Whenever possible he would also have them live with him for two or three days continuously to intensify their training. With the motherly heart of a guru, he devoted himself to their service. He would take meticulous care of all aspects of their life, teaching them to be ever vigilant and careful in respect of lust and lucre — the most deadly enemies of spiritual life. 'You boys', he said, 'are the chosen people of the Divine Mother. She will get many things done through you. So I say unto you, be very very careful.'[15] Thus, a sort of informal, and mainly non-residential, training centre for this young group (and sometimes for one or two householders like 'M') started functioning under the Master's care at Dakshineswar. Meanwhile, seeing people's misery through his own eyes as well as through several spiritual visions, Sri Ramakrishna's longing to serve humanity to alleviate their suffering caused by spiritual ignorance, grew more intense day by day. Not only did he exert himself fully in his spiritual ministration, sacrificing rest for his body, but he would sometimes shed profuse tears that he could not do more owing to his fragile health.[16] He would say, 'I shall do good to others even if I have to subsist on mere sago water,' or, 'I would indeed feel blessed if by assuming a thousand births I can liberate one single person.'[17]

Continuous overwork soon told upon Sri Ramakrishna's delicate health and he fell ill with cancer. He was taken first to Shyampukur (in Calcutta) in October 1885, and then to Cossipore (a suburb of Calcutta) in December of

the same year. It looked as though the training of the young select disciples would suffer or stop altogether. But, just the reverse happened! Previously the devotees and the spiritual seekers could not visit Dakshineswar easily because of the long distance and dearth of public transport facilities. Whereas now they could come to Cossipore more frequently to see the ailing Master, and also to get the benefit of his spiritual ministration. The boy devotees took upon themselves the task of attending upon him by turns. First they used to come and go back to their homes daily. Later, at the rented Cossipore garden house, as Sri Ramakrishna's illness became aggravated, they stayed with him day and night, forsaking their parents, relatives, studies, and all other pursuits. Under the guidance of Narendra, who became their natural leader, they served the Master at scheduled hours, but during the rest of the time they began to do intense and systematic spiritual practices in the form of japa, meditation, bhajans, etc. under their great guru's watchful guidance and unceasing encouragement. They were worried and depressed, no doubt, seeing the Master sinking day by day despite their utmost care and treatment, but urged on by Narendra, they were up and doing to make the best use of the rare opportunities of *guru-sevā* and *sādhanā* for their spiritual illumination.

Thus, Cossipore became a veritable Spiritual Training Institute for the coming builders of the Order. Simultaneously, a bond of deep love and brotherhood grew up without anybody's conscious effort among the devotees in general and among these young boy devotees in particular. This development took place in such a manner that the devotees themselves wondered at it. Many of them even thought that Sri Ramakrishna, God-incarnate as he was, had contracted the throat disease of his own accord for the purpose of forming a brotherhood of devotees, and that he would cure himself as soon as that purpose was fulfilled.[18] Sri Ramakrishna actually seemed to be consciously arranging everything, smoothly and methodically, for the genesis as well as the subsequent growth of the Order that was to fulfill his mission on earth — the mission of alleviating human misery through the re–establishment of true religion in human hearts.

Perhaps, finding that Sri Ramakrishna did not form any official committee or the like, some members of a contemporary religious group remarked that Paramahamsadeva had 'no faculty for organization',[19] but future events bore out that, guided by the Mother of the Universe, Sri Ramakrishna had been

doing everything that was necessary for laying a secure foundation for the coming Order. He was ensuring, as it were, that no loophole, no lacuna, was left anywhere in the process. He seemed to be perfectly aware of the essentials of an organization, and a religious organization at that. First of all he was making sure that the hearts and aspirations of all the members of the Order were tuned to the highest spiritual ideal. Secondly, he was seeing to it that the members — being of one heart, one thought, one resolve, and one goal — were binding themselves together indissolubly by a cord of love and service to one another. This view is corroborated by the Holy Mother, who in later years said:

> The Master had the power to die at will. He could have easily given up the body in samādhi. But he would say, 'It will be nice if I unite all these youngsters together in a close bond of love....' That is why the Master did not give up the body early, inspite of so much suffering.[20]

It may be mentioned here in passing that these cardinal principles of Sri Ramakrishna, i.e. love for the highest spiritual goal, and brotherly love among the members, are even now given topmost priority over everything else, and certainly over formal adherence to rules in the twin organizations — the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.

The selecting of a leader and his special training are of great importance in the case of any new organization. This question did not escape Sri Ramakrishna's attention either. By his words and other indications he made it plain that he had chosen Narendra to be the leader of the group. He was training this extraordinary spiritual genius not only in matters of his spiritual development, but in respect of something else, namely, how to prevent these would-be monks, the select boy devotees, from returning to worldly life, and how to guide them and hold them together. 'Every evening after dusk he would ask all others to move away, call the Swami [then Narendra] to him, and teach him all these [things] for two to three hours continuously, sometimes drawing him into a discussion.'[21]

As days passed on, certain significant incidents, each meaningful and relevant to the formation of the Order, occurred in quick succession at Cossipore. One day, probably in the first half of January 1886, one of the disciples, Gopal Senior (later known as Swami Advaitananda) expressed his desire to

distribute some pieces of ochre cloth and rosaries among some sannyāsins staying near the Ganga. Pointing to his young disciples, Sri Ramakrishna said that each of them was far superior to any average monk and so he could give those gifts to them. Senior Gopal gladly agreed. The Master, purifying the cloths and the articles through the uttering of holy mantras, distributed them among his select group of disciples. And thus was made a small, quiet, but significant beginning of the future Ramakrishna Order of monks, outside the public gaze.[22]

Although all the young disciples were making rapid progress in their spiritual practices, their leader Narendranath's intensity of fervour was conspicuous. He was then burdened by appalling poverty at home, through which his family — his mother and young brothers — were passing owing to the sudden death of his father. He was unable to secure employment anywhere. Nevertheless, he was diving deep into spiritual practices day by day. He used to implore the Master for complete absorption in the Supreme Brahman, *nirvikalpa samādhi*, as we have seen. Sri Ramakrishna scolded him:

> What a shame! You are such a highly qualified aspirant, and you speak like this! I took you to be a huge banyan tree under which thousands would find shelter, and here you are craving for personal emancipation![23]

However, within a few days Narendra lost himself in meditation and attained the bliss and illumination of *nirvikalpa samādhi*. Presently, the Master called him to his side and said:

> Now the Mother has shown you everything. But this realization of yours shall remain locked up, and the key shall be with me. You have work to do. When you have finished my work the treasure-box will be unlocked again for you![24]

Only a few days before the final departure, the Master called Narendra to his side and wrote on a piece of paper, 'Naren will teach others.' Narendra protested, 'I won't do any such thing.' Thereupon the Master said with loving authority, 'Your very bones will do it.'[25] Another day the Master transmitted his spiritual power to Narendra by steadfastly looking at him and then going into deep meditation. Narendra felt as though a subtle force like an electric shock were entering into his body. Sri Ramakrishna said:

> Today I have given you my all and have become a fakir. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that will you go where you came from.[26]

Two days before his passing away the Master said to him:

> See, Naren, I leave all these my boys to your care because you are the wisest and ablest of them all. Take care of them with great love, see that they do not return home but continue spiritual practices living together in one place.[27]

These incidents clearly show how Sri Ramakrishna was preparing Narendra to be the leader and caretaker of a monastic group. Sri Ramakrishna's words to the effect that his young disciples were to continue their spiritual practices *living together in one place* are significant. They imply that he did not want them to become like wandering Hindu monks of the traditional type, but to *live together in one place*, obviously in a monastery and therefore, in an Order. This idea is confirmed further by a letter of Swami Vivekananda written on 26th May 1890 to Mr. Pramadadas Mitra. He wrote: 'Now his [Sri Ramakrishna's] behest to me was that I should devote myself to the service of the Order of all-renouncing devotees founded by him.... *His command was that his all-renouncing devotees should group themselves together..., and I am entrusted with seeing to this.*'[28] Referring to the importance of Cossipore in the history of the Order, Swami Vivekananda remarked in a letter dated 13 July 1897, addressed to Swami Brahmananda, 'All our associations centre round that garden of Cossipore. In reality that is our first Math.'[29] About Sri Ramakrishna's role in the origination of the Order, Swami Shivananda in later years said: 'We did not form this Sangha [Order]. During the period of his illness [at Cossipore] the Master himself formed it.'[30]

At Cossipore Sri Ramakrishna not only prepared the minds of the young disciples for the future work of the Divine Mother — the work of the would-be Ramakrishna Order — he also prepared simultaneously the mind of Sri Sarada Devi, his immaculate wife, for this great task. As a wife and also as the Master's first disciple, she had her training under him right from her girlhood and was worshipped by him as the Mother of the Universe. Sri Ramakrishna was well aware of her spiritual greatness. At Cossipore Sri

Ramakrishna now endearingly entreated her to live in this world after his passing and to alleviate people's suffering. As he was rapidly sinking, one day he said to her in an aggrieved tone, 'Well, my dear, won't you do something? Must this [pointing to his body] do everything single-handedly?' 'I am a woman', said the Mother, 'What can I do?' 'No, no,' said the Master, 'You will have to do a lot.' Another day he implored her: 'People of Calcutta [i.e., the common people of the world] appear to be crawling about like worms in the dark. Do look after them.'[31] Holy Mother had not the heart to say no to this touching appeal. This silent acceptance of an enormous responsibility by Holy Mother was to have a tremendous effect on both the genesis as well as the subsequent growth of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

IV

Other factors in the genesis of the Order: (1) Sri Ramakrishna's invisible hand after his passing away — the establishment of the Ramakrishna Math at Baranagore —

Sri Ramakrishna passed away on 16 August 1886, plunging all into profound grief. After the cremation at the Cossipore cremation ground, on the following day the young disciples started worshipping the holy ashes of his body collected in a copper urn which was devotedly placed in the Master's room. The lease of the house was due to expire within a fortnight. The householders saw no reason why the lease should be extended. The devotees headed by Ramchandra Datta advised the young devotees to go back to their homes and resume their studies, or attend to other duties of their families and thus lead ideal householders' lives based on the teachings of the Master. They were not aware of Sri Ramakrishna's special instruction of renunciation to these young devotees. With regard to the ashes and relics of Sri Ramakrishna, Ramchandra Datta said that they would be interred and worshipped at Kankurgachi, a suburb of Calcutta, where he had already established a retreat for meditation and congregational singing. This retreat was sanctified by Sri Ramakrishna, who visited it in 1883.

But Narendra wanted to start a monastery to implement the Master's mandate, although he was financially helpless to do anything about it. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, who also possessed a far reaching, broad vision of the great things to come in the wake of the Master's advent, had much sympathy with the ideas of Narendranath and his group of young devotees. But financially she was even poorer than any of them. Narendranath decided wisely to avoid any altercation with Ramchandra Datta and his group of devotees. So he and the other young devotees accepted Ramchandra Datta's proposal to place the urn of relics at his Kankurgachi home. The urn was then solemnly buried under an altar at Kankurgachi on 23 August 1886. However, a good part of the relics had been separated from the main urn by the would-be monks and preserved at the house of Balaram Bose, who was sympathetic with them.

The young devotees, except four such as Latu, etc. who had no connection with their families, returned home, finding no other alternative. And thus the budding monastery at Cossipore that was nurtured by Sri Ramakrishna with great care and attention was for the time being nipped in the bud. But a Divine Hand was working on a subtler plane.

One evening Surendra Nath Mitra, who used to bear a major part of the expenses at the Cossipore garden house, had a vision in which Sri Ramakrishna said to him: 'What are you doing? My children are wandering in the streets. Look at their plight. Make some arrangements for them without delay.' Hearing this command of the Master, Surendra hastened to Narendra's home, and with tearful eyes told him what had happened. He then said: 'Brother,... Let us rent a house. You young boys will live there and make it our Master's shrine; and we householders shall go there from time to time to share your bliss and pacify our hearts.... I used to spend a sum of money for the Master at Cossipore. I shall gladly give it now for your expenses.' Narendra was overwhelmed with emotion on hearing this.[32]

Thus a monastery was started in the latter half of September 1886 in a dilapidated, haunted house near the Ganga at Baranagore, a northern suburb of Calcutta, with Gopal Senior (later Swami Advaitananda), Tarak (later Swami Shivananda), and Kali (later Swami Abhedananda) as the first inmates. Narendranath at first used to come and go now and then as he had to look after his widowed mother and brothers' problems, but later he stayed on for good. Besides, he used to go to the houses of those young brother disciples

who had returned to their homes and resumed their studies. He reminded them of the life of total renunciation that Sri Ramakrishna had chalked out for them. Inspired by his fiery words they all started to join the monastery one by one.

Another incident took place towards the end of the year 1886 which was very significant to the genesis of the Order. Invited by the pious mother of Baburam (later Swami Premananda), Narendranath and other young disciples of the Master went to her village home at Antpur, about 30 kilometres from Calcutta. Earnest spiritual aspirants as they all were, they spent their time there in a round of prayer, meditation, bhajans, hymns, holy study, and spiritual talk. One evening they started meditating under the canopy of a starlit sky in front of a huge fire of logs. They later came to know that it was Christmas Eve. Meditation over, Narendra, without any pre-planning, started describing vividly and inspiringly the life of renunciation of Jesus Christ. He continued and ended by telling of the lives of the apostles such as St. Paul and others who, braving all hardship and suffering, carried the message of the Lord far and near. They were thrilled to remember the same life of renunciation and intense suffering for humanity enacted before their eyes in the life of another world teacher, their own Master, Sri Ramakrishna. One in heart and spirit, one in thoughts and determination, one in apostolic fervour, they finally decided, then and there, once and for all, that they would completely cut off relations with their families and embrace the life of all-out renunciation, completely depending on the Lord, like the apostles of Lord Jesus, for the practice and preaching of the Master's message. Recalling the days spent at Antpur, Swami Shivananda would say in later years, '...As a matter of fact, our resolve to become organized became firm at Antpur. The Master had made us Sannyāsins. The attitude was strengthened at Antpur.'[33] After a week they returned to Baranagore and resumed their spiritual practices with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. Within a few weeks after their return from Antpur, perhaps in early January 1887, at the suggestion of Narendranath they performed the Virajā Homa (the scripturally-prescribed ritual for initiation into sannyāsa) and changed their names. Rakhal became Swami Brahmananda, Baburam became Swami Premananda, and so on. Thus the process of the genesis of the Ramakrishna Order at last took a concrete shape.

V

Other factors in the genesis of the Order: (ii) Intense spiritual practices and severe austerities of the young monastics —

At the newly established Math the young monks lived a life of severe austerity, meditation, study, and prayer. The centre of the Math was, of course, the shrine room in which one of them, Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) had installed the Master's relics. He worshipped him there, feeling his living presence. The monks would get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and become immersed in meditation. Their meditation would continue throughout the day and sometimes even during the late hours of the night. They lived on what chance brought them. There were days when they had nothing to eat. For months they lived on boiled leaves of the bimba creeper and rice. They each had two pieces of *kaupina* (loin cloth) for use in the monastery but one common piece of cloth and a chaddar (upper garment) for outdoor work. They slept on straw mats spread on the bare ground. But these inconveniences mattered little; they were swept away by a wave of ecstatic love and devotion for the Master and the lofty ideals he preached.

It should be noted in this connection that these awe-inspiring spiritual practices and austerities were the subtler forces of thought that exerted a profound impact upon both the genesis and the future development of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Vivekananda in later years pointed out that had it not been for the severe austerities and *sādhanās* practised by himself and the brotherhood, both during the lifetime of the Master and after his mahāsamādhi, and had it not been for the Master's divine life which stood as an example before them, they could not have achieved what they had done.[34]

VI

Other factors in the genesis of the Order: (iii) Holy Mother's tearful prayer —

A major factor working at the genesis of the Order was a continuous tearful prayer issuing from the anguished heart of Holy Mother for the

establishment and stability of the Order as well as for its material needs. The prayer was intensified in 1890 when Mother saw the contrast between the nice arrangements for the monks at Bodh Gaya and the poor living conditions of her boys, but it had been wringing her heart wherever she went ever since the days of the Master's mahāsamādhi in 1886. To quote her:

> Ah! For this, how I shed tears and prayed to the Master! And only then, through his grace has come into existence today the Math (monastery). When the Master left his body, I ...felt intensely sad and prayed thus to the Master, 'Master, you came, played and disported with these few and then went away; and should everything end with that? If so, where was the need for coming down in the midst of so much sorrow? I have seen in Banaras and Vrindavan many holy men who get their food by begging and shift their residence from the shadow of one tree to that of another. There is no dearth of holy men of that type. I shan't be able to bear the sight of my sons, who come out in your name, going about begging for food. My prayer is that those who leave the world in your name may never be in need of bare subsistence. They will all live together holding to your ideas and ideals; and the people afflicted with the worries of the world will resort to them and be solaced by hearing about you. That's why you came. My heart is pained to see them wandering about.' After that, Naren (Swami Vivekananda) began gradually building up all this.[35]

About Holy Mother's prayer for the Order, Yogin-Ma (Mother's close attendant and Sri Ramakrishna's disciple) said to a group of devotees:

> Whatever you see today, the Maths and the Ashramas, are all due to her grace alone! In those days [the early days of the Baranagore Math] whenever she visited a holy shrine, it was a habit with her to entreat the Deity, with tears in her eyes, for a boon — the boon that her children might be blessed with a shelter over their heads and the wherewithal to appease their hunger. That wish of the mother has been fulfilled.[36]

The prayer of the Mother reveals not only her affection and compassion but also her clear vision of what the Ramakrishna Order was going to be. She wanted it to be an Order where monks would work for their own spiritual liberation (*ātmano mokṣārtham*) according to the Master's teachings, and

simultaneously cater to the needs of the afflicted people seeking solace (*jagathita*). How Mother played her role as a guiding force of the Order in later years is outside the scope of this essay. But it is good to remember here that while formally inaugurating the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897, Swami Vivekananda described her as *Sangha Janani* — the Mother of the Order.[37]

VII

Other factors at the genesis of the Order: (iv) Householder disciples' sacrifices and contributions —

During the last illness of Sri Ramakrishna, most of the close devotees of the Master jointly met the expenses of the Cossipore house and its establishment — Surendranath (or Suresh) Mitra meeting the entire rent expense. Later, as mentioned earlier, the Baranagore Math also came into existence through his unstinted, continuous financial support till his death in 1890. About him Swami Vivekananda said: 'Know him to be the source of this Math. It was he who helped to found the Baranagore Math...who supplied our needs. Who can equal him in devotion and faith?'[38] However, there were a few other householders who also made great sacrifices for the newly built Math. Remembering them Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter of 1895: 'After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, all forsook us as so many worthless, ragged boys. Only people like Balaram [Balaram Bose], Suresh [Suresh or Surendranath Mitra], Master [Mahendranath Gupta], and Chuni Babu [Chunilal Bose] were our friends at the hour of need. We shall never be able to repay our debts to them.'[39] It may be noted here that none of these devotees was rich; they were more or less middle class people of moderate means. In fact, they had to save money from their household budget and deny themselves personal comforts to be able to help the monastic brothers of the newly started monastery.[40]

One day Balaram noticed that in the monastery the monks were eating only rice and a cheap preparation of bimba leaves. Returning home he arranged for himself only that kind of food, for he could not relish rich food when the Master's sons fared thus. 'From then he made it a rule to send them some vegetables regularly and he instructed the Math cook to inform him whenever the stock ran short, for he knew that the monks would rather starve than ask of

him.'[41] Once at Cossipore the financial hardships caused some worries. Girish then said that he would 'meet all expenses single-handedly, even if that meant the selling of his ancestral house to the last brick.'[42] These were not empty words. After the death of Surendranath and Balaram Bose, Girish and Master (Mahendranath Gupta) jointly strived to support the Baranagore Math financially.

VIII

The final factor at the genesis of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission: (v) Swami Vivekananda's experiences during his wandering (parivrājaka) life in India and his experiences in the West —

We have seen that the process of the genesis of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission began during the days of Sri Ramakrishna's life at Dakshineswar and took a concrete shape with the establishment of the Ramakrishna Math at Baranagore in September 1886. But the Math was then in an unstable and changing condition. Some of the would-be monks did not join the Math at that time. Those that joined, with the exception of Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda), used to go out to different places for *tapasyā* or on pilgrimage. This situation prevailed for six or seven years more. So from that point of view the process of the genesis of the Order continued till then. From the ideological point of view the process of genesis continued till the close of the wandering (*parivrājaka*) life of Swami Vivekananda. It is true that the main ideology of the Order had been from the very beginning: 'Life is for the liberation of the self and for the welfare of the world' — *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca*. There was absolute conviction in every member's mind in the first half of the ideology, i.e. liberation of the self. About the second half of the ideal, i.e. to work for the welfare or service of the world, the brother monks of Swamiji cherished the traditional notion that monks' services for the welfare of the world should be limited to giving people spiritual instruction and explaining scriptures to them. The idea that such services should include diverse kinds of activities done in a spirit of worship of God-in-man — for their material, educational, and cultural uplift — was not conceived in the early days of the Math. The idea might have been there in Swami Vivekananda's

mind somewhat vaguely but not in terms of specific concrete activities. Sri Ramakrishna's mandate to Narendra was that he would have to do His work or Mother's work and to teach people. But what type of work was Mother's work and what people — not only Indians but others also — he would have to teach was not made clear to him by his guru. Swami Vivekananda's wandering life in India from 1888 to 1892 made these points vivid and clear to him. And once he came to know of these points he made it the mission of his life, and the mission of his organization, to implement them. Romain Rolland, his French biographer, has rightly said:

> But this consciousness of his mission only came and took possession of him after years of direct experience, wherein he saw with his own eyes and touched with his own hands the miserable and glorious body of humanity — his Mother India in all her tragic nakedness.[43]

While travelling throughout India, Swamiji happened to stop at Hathras railway station. In reply to a query, there he said that as days passed by, he understood the implications of his guru's instructions to him: it was to work for the regeneration of India and to preach India's spirituality all over the world. A brighter, more concrete picture of this mission flashed in his meditation at Kanyakumari in December 1892.

Thus, at the close of his wandering life in India, he came to the conclusion that it was futile to preach metaphysics to people when they are sunk in ignorance, poverty, and hunger. In that changed situation of society the monks should not stick to their old line of work, the preaching of religion and metaphysics exclusively. Along with the preaching of ennobling ideas — the man-making, character-building ideas of religion — in simple language, they should also work for the agricultural, industrial, technological, scientific, educational, and cultural advancement of all people — rich and poor — in a spirit of worship of God-in-man (*karma-yoga*), but simultaneously they would have to follow their traditional practice of prayer (*bhakti-yoga*), meditation (*dhyāna-yoga*), and discrimination (*jñāna-yoga*) for their own Self-realization. And he further decided to start this kind of work with the help of his own people, the monks of the Ramakrishna Order.

So we may say that the process of the ideological genesis of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission was completed at the close of

Swamiji's wandering life in India. His stay in the West convinced him of the value and urgency of organized work, and also of the necessity of his and his organization's giving freely the liberal, scientific, and rational spiritual ideas of Vedanta to the people there suffering from the ills of affluence. For Sri Ramakrishna had asked him to work for people, and among peoples of the world he did not make any distinction between the East and the West or between nations, creeds, sects, and communities.

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The First Phase of Ramakrishna Movement (1872 to 1905)

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

YEAR-LONG CELEBRATIONS of the Ramakrishna Mission Centenary all over the country and abroad in 1997 made people aware of the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission Association (in short, 'Ramakrishna Mission'), which took place on 1 May 1897. Its supporters, under the dynamic leadership of Swami Vivekananda, had decided to form an organization 'in view of the increasing interest and expansion of the movement to diffuse Paramahamsa Deva's ideas, teachings and principles'. On May 5 they drew up its objective as follows: 'The object (aim) of the society is to propagate the principles propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and illustrated by His own life for the benefit of humanity and help mankind in the practical application of those principles in their intellectual and spiritual needs.'[1] Therefore the 'Ramakrishna Mission' formed was not essentially different from the 'Movement' initiated by Sri Ramakrishna.

The proceedings of the two meetings and subsequent happenings reveal that the Mission Association, formed 'to carry on the existing work methodically', seems to have been the foundational stratum of the centres now known as the Ramakrishna Math, Ramakrishna Mission, Advaita Ashrama, Vedanta Society, and other variants, with the principal centre at Belur. But they had been classified into two categories, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, by the authorities on 25 August 1910. The Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission became two distinct legal entities from 6 February 1901

and 4 May 1909 respectively. However, both of them banked heavily for their management upon the Ramakrishna Order of monks founded by Sri Ramakrishna in 1886. The use of the terms 'Math' and 'Mission' remained wrapped in confusion for some decades even as the authorities, the same persons constituting the Board of Trustees of the Math and the Governing Body of the Mission, laid more stress on ideals than on structural, functional, or legal aspects of the organizations. All said and done, the Math and Mission flourishing side by side — like the Ganga and Yamuna — constitute the main strand of the Ramakrishna Movement; among other strands are the Vivekananda Societies, Sarada Math, Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Ramakrishna Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishad, Sarada Sangha, and the Vedanta Societies in the West.

Ever since the birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda in 1963, some scholars have called the movement 'the Ramakrishna–Vivekananda Movement'. Nevertheless no one should miss the significant observation made by Swami Gambhirananda. He said that the ideas of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement had emanated from Sri Ramakrishna, though Swami Vivekananda, through his dynamism, made them known to the world and showed how they could be given a practical shape.[2] Sri Ramakrishna was undoubtedly the origin of the movement.

Sri Ramakrishna had appeared at a critical juncture in history. Invasion after invasion by hordes from the north had crippled the disorganized Hindu society, which had been further weakened by the later degenerate Buddhist culture. Before it could recover from these traumatic experiences traders from several European nations tried to capture the market here. The British traders surpassed others and finally fulfilled their political ambition. India became a colony of Britain. Exploitation of the worst form sapped the nation's vitality. In those dark days religion failed its practitioners. It became an instrument of oppression for suppressing the lower castes. And the Ramakrishna Movement was launched to save India and her people. It has shown great promise already.

In 1937, Professor William Ernest Hocking described the Ramakrishna Movement as 'the lengthened shadow' of Sri Ramakrishna,[3] the great man. In the same year Dr. S. Radhakrishnan highlighted in his writing 'the powerful revival of social compassion under the inspiration of the great teacher Sri Ramakrishna'. Twenty years later the British writer Christopher Isherwood

observed that the Ramakrishna Movement was unique because its founder Sri Ramakrishna was unique.[4] He thought Sri Ramakrishna was 'incomparably the greatest spiritual leader produced by mankind in the past two centuries'. Another forty years later, in 1997, Hans Torwesten saw in him 'above all other things the *Pleroma*, the absolute fullness, to which nothing can really be added'.[5] Every knowledgeable person acknowledges that Sri Ramakrishna, the person and the ideal, was the fountain of the Movement. Swami Vivekananda emphasized the philosophical elements revealed in the Master's teachings, whereas Sarada Devi's stress was on the personality of the Master, for an average man needs a concrete symbol to worship and to pray to. Then Sri Ramakrishna had idealized in his life ideas 'deeper than the sea and vaster than the sky'. Such an ideal as Sri Ramakrishna represents can hardly be realized by a single person. Swami Vivekananda, therefore, advocated that the members of the Ramakrishna Order of monks should work together to approximate the ideal.

The life story of Sri Ramakrishna has two distinct phases, apparently contradictory to each other. The first one depicts a Sri Ramakrishna entirely devoted to God, whereas the other one seems to have been dominated by his concern for men. The wave of compassion for suffering humanity that filled Sri Ramakrishna's heart could persuade Narendranath to hold in abeyance his persistent desire to keep himself merged in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, and instead shoulder the responsibility of carrying out his Master's mission. Consequently, he dedicated heart and soul 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of many'.

Like the mighty sacred Ganga, the Ramakrishna Movement, emerging from the glacier Ramakrishna, a condensation of three thousand years of the spiritual life of India, has rolled down the hills and dales of the Indian mind as a lever of good for human beings. Fortified by several potent ideas and a vast mass of spiritual energy, the Movement's ultimate aim is nothing short of renewal of life on earth.

Some talented companions of Sri Ramakrishna had anticipated the Movement even in Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime. 'M', the chronicler of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, cherished the desire that a current would flow from Sri Ramakrishna. He hoped that everything would be carried away by its force, and he knew that nothing that would come out of him would be

monotonous. Sarada Devi, at Kamarpukur in 1888, saw in a vision a stream of water springing from the Master's feet and flowing in waves. She felt it was but the purifying, redemptive Ganga. And ten years later Swami Vivekananda envisioned Sri Ramakrishna on the topmost crest of the huge wave which was to usher in a new age. All of them foresaw a spiritual movement that was going to sweep humanity and carry it to a higher level of consciousness.

Contrary to some popular theory, Swami Vivekananda never claimed that he had initiated a movement other than that of his Master's. His vast learning and intellect, his passionate devotion to his guru, his concern for the poverty of his countrymen undeniably made him an irresistible instrument in carrying forth his Master's mission. A native of British India, an almost unknown Hindu monk, Swami Vivekananda had stormed the bastion of the New World of the West in 1893 and raised the flag of Vedanta. Acclaimed as 'the most prominent figure in the Parliament of Religions the Swami made an impression on American society which no oriental did before.'[6] He had launched an apostolic campaign to sow the seed of Vedanta in North America, England, and the Continent. His inner conviction prompted him to declare, 'I have a message to the West as Buddha had for the East.' Thereby, besides considerable publicity, he received a small but growing circle of devotees.

Many months before his triumphal return to his homeland, Swami Vivekananda, when at Detroit, had exclaimed in ecstasy one day: 'India must listen to me! I shall shake India to her foundations. I shall send an electric thrill through her national veins.'[7] Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru seemed to have believed it when he said, 'Swami Vivekananda shook the soul of India and moulded Indians' mind and thought.'[8] Taking a cue from the unprecedented rousing welcome he had received in his homeland, Swamiji whipped up the slumbering nation in two series of fiery lectures, one from Colombo to Calcutta and another from Calcutta to Lahore. Also, he spelled out his 'Plan of Campaign' at Madras and pointedly told his countrymen at Calcutta, 'This is the task before you'. His plan, in bare skeleton, was to deluge the Western countries with India's spirituality and, in exchange, to import from the West science and technology, a work ethic, and organizational skills to rejuvenate the then sluggish Indian society.

Though visibly moved by the sudden enthusiasm of his countrymen, its volatile nature did not escape the Swami's notice. It became transparent even

to a foreigner, J. J. Goodwin, who wrote on 14 April 1897 to Mrs. Ole Bull, 'For every success he has there (in the West) the influence here is tenfold, but when he is among his own people the truth of the saying — "A prophet has no honour in his country" is verified as far as active help is concerned.'[9] Despite discouraging response from his countrymen, Swami Vivekananda, undaunted as he was, commissioned the machine 'Ramakrishna Mission' on 1 May 1897.[10] All that Swami Vivekananda did was, briefly speaking, enumeration, interpretation, and application of his Master's message.

This part of the story, leaving aside its ramifications, is as well known as its earlier and crucial part is little known. The less known sequence of events, in essence, is this: The arduous spiritual practices of Sri Ramakrishna for twelve years had culminated, in 1872, in several divine revelations about himself and his life's mission. One of them was that 'as an instrument in the hands of the Mother of the Universe, he would have to found a new community especially fitted for the liberal faith revealed in his own life.'[11] Impregnated with Divine consciousness Sri Ramakrishna moved forward to implement this grand mission. As a full-bloomed lotus draws bees, so also Paramahamsadeva, as he was known in those days, turned out to be the focus of an expanding circle of devotees and admirers.

In March 1875 the Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen discovered in Sri Ramakrishna a spiritual giant. To share his discovery with others he spoke of the saint in his sermons and in his writings for journals. The Brahmos of different denominations, people belonging to different indigenous and non-indigenous faiths, householders, and unmarried youths from different strata of society began crowding into the Master's room in Dakshineswar, particularly on weekends and holidays. Also, Brahmos and Hindus invited him to their temples and houses. Every visit of his turned into a festival. The people's prime attraction was 'the Paramahamsa' — his charming talks, devotional songs, dancing in the joy of the Spirit, and his slipping at times into the state of samādhi. His repeated visits, every time creating a mart of joy, brought together devotees and kindred souls. Interaction among themselves as well as with their cynosure, Sri Ramakrishna, made the groups cohesive. The celebration of his birth anniversary at Dakshineswar brought them closer still. About these spiritual gatherings exuding joy different from the ordinary pleasure of the world, the Master's biographer Swami Saradananda observed,

'As time thus passed on, the Master's circle of devotees grew wider with him for the centre of attraction.'[12] His influence on those who lived within his orbit became manifest in their mundane and spiritual life too. In this way, the Movement had a humble beginning; hardly discernible was its flow, but its impact was considerable already. Sri Ramakrishna himself told one of his women disciples, 'Everything had been lifeless, but since this (referring to his person) came, all these have come to life again and a current of religion is now flowing just a little below the surface.'[13]

The First Monastery at Cossipore

While the Master kept his door open, he was very careful in selecting young men who were to constitute the core group of the community he was building up. Testing the eligibility of each by natural means and by his supernatural insight, he completed their selection before he left for Cossipore. Some of them had already joined Narendranath to serve their ailing Master at Shyampukur, where he moved from Dakshineswar on 2 October 1885. Now most of them came to Cossipore to stay with the Master and serve him. Some householder devotees came too. Sri Ramakrishna spent his time with redoubled energy to organize a strong Order of monks to serve as the core of the community.

The garden house at 90 Cossipore road in the north suburb of Calcutta hired for the medical treatment and nursing of Sri Ramakrishna turned into a centre for the training of those youths selected by him already. The young disciples dedicated themselves to serving their Master lovingly while he poured into their hearts the fire of renunciation and the thirst for realizing the Truth. More than that, he gave them pure love in abundance. He gave them special training and also a great gift, 'the desire and life-long struggle not only to talk, but to live the life' enabling them to serve as the vanguard of his mission. Soon they coalesced into a bond of fraternity — 'sweet and tender' and yet, 'a hard and unbreakable bond'.[14] It was a bond of pure love — love for their Master, love for one another, and also love for the ideal the Master upheld.[15]

The Master 'predicted that a band of young disciples, with Narendranath as their leader, would in due course renounce the world and devote themselves to the realization of God and the service of humanity.'[16] As a token he distributed ochre clothes and rudrāksha beads to eleven of them. To enable Narendra

to shoulder the arduous task, the Master gave him special training, a mandate for his role of *loka-śikṣaka* and an experience of *nirvikalpa samādhi* for which he was pining. He also mysteriously transmitted his power to Narendra three or four days before giving up his physical body. Thus quietly and in a phased manner the Master handed over to Narendranath the central authority of the community he had created. In the meantime, Sarada Devi appeared for the first time, in a rudimentary form however, in the unique role she was to play to sustain and strengthen the Movement.

During the early days at Cossipore Math the Master had one day blessed the householder devotees and revealed to them his identity by declaring himself a Divine Incarnation. Earlier still, as well as later, the Master spelled out the role expected of them ensuring, however, that they maintain a dignified distance from the monks while serving the cause of the Movement.

Sarada Devi would later hint at the unique status the Cossipore garden occupies in the chequered history of the Movement. She said: 'The place is associated with so much meditation, samādhi, and the practice of austerities. It is the place where the Master entered into mahāsamādhi. It is a place permeated with intense spiritual vibration.'[17] No wonder Swami Vivekananda considered the garden house as their first Math.

The curtain of the great life of the Master fell two minutes past one in the early hours of 16 August 1886. A sudden gloom overtook the inmates of the Cossipore Math. Bewildered and unable to decide what to do, the young all-renouncing disciples, as also Sarada Devi, however, soon discovered to their joy that the Master had not left them; he was very much with them in spirit. They took steps to worship Sri Ramakrishna in the urn containing his holy relics, later called 'Sriji'. After five days Sarada Devi moved to Balaram Bose's, and then went to Vrindavan on a pilgirmage. The Master's relics were divided into two parts — one part was taken in a procession and ceremoniously interred at the retreat of Ramchandra Datta at Kankurgachi on 23 August, and the other part was temporarily kept in the shrine of Balaram Bose; it was taken to Baranagore Math later and worshipped daily. Meanwhile, the monastery at Cossipore had to be wound up by the end of August 1886.

Curiously enough, most of the episodes associated with the transforming of the small group of all-renouncing devotees into the nucleus of a movement went unnoticed by the devotees like Ramchandra Datta, Manomohan Mitra,

and Nabagopal Ghosh. Even a close friend of the world renouncers like 'M' could hardly guess what the ideas of the Master were. There had been some misunderstanding between the would-be monks and the householder devotees over the Master's relics. The misunderstanding was rooted in a basic issue. Senior householder devotees like Ramchandra Datta refused to lend credence to the young disciples' claim that the Master had planted in them the seed for an Order of monks. Truly, it was an awkward situation, for some young disciples had snapped family ties and had no place to live. Nine years later Narendra, referring to their pitiable condition, would write to Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) that all had forsaken them 'as so many worthless ragged boys'. Only a few like Balaram Bose, Suresh Mitra, and Chunilal Bose had stood by them.[18]

Imbued with the Master's spirit the young disciples were determined, come what may, to translate into action what they had been taught by their Master. Narendra was their guide and continual source of inspiration. One evening Surendranath Mitra was meditating in his family shrine when, in a vision, he received the instruction from Sri Ramakrishna to extend assistance to the young ones. Immediately he went to Narendra and promised to give them as much money as he had given for the Cossipore Math. There is another story: As senior members of his family refused to keep in their house an oil painting of a fierce-looking Mother Kali procured by Surendra, the latter was upset. Finally his mind could be at peace when the Master asked him to hang the painting on the wall of his room at Cossipore. Surendra felt disturbed again when the rented house at Cossipore had to be vacated, for he did not know where to put the painting. To solve both of these problems at one stroke, Surendra proposed to rent a house for the young monks. These are the two versions of how the Baranagore house was acquired.

The Second Monastery at Baranagore

One dreary and dilapidated house, haunted by evil spirits, in Baranagore was rented at Rs. 11 per month. Surendra contributed Rs. 30 a month in the beginning. As the number of inmates increased he increased the amount to Rs. 100. Inaugurated on 19 October 1886, the monastery had its shrine on the first floor. Sri Ramakrishna's portrait was placed on a bed and the urn containing

Shyampukur

Cossipore Garden House

Baranagore Math

Some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and others at Baranagore Math

Alambazar Math

the relics of the Master and his slippers were placed at the foot of the bed. Gopal Senior became the first member. Taraknath returned from Benares to join him there. Narendra, Shashi, Sharat, and a few others used to visit the Math frequently. Kali joined within a month and Rakhal after a few months.

An incident at Antpur, the native village of Baburam (Swami Premananda), hastened the cohesion of the brotherhood. Welcoming the invitation of Matangini Devi, mother of Baburam, Narendra and eight other young disciples of the Master travelled to Antpur by train. Their visit turned into a retreat. There they chatted freely, sang songs, read books, swam in the ponds, and meditated for long periods. They realized more clearly than ever before that they all shared a common goal of life. Their spiritual fervour reached its height one evening when they sat for meditation around a dhuni-fire in the courtyard, with the sparkling stars overhead and stillness all around. At one point Narendra began to earnestly narrate the life of Christ. He charged them to live like Christ, who had 'no place to lay his head', and spread the redemptive message of their Master. Inflamed by renewed idealism they rose up in a body before the dhuni and pledged themselves to a life of renunciation. Soon afterwards they discovered that it had been Christmas Eve.

Returning to Calcutta, the renunciates trickled one by one into the Baranagore monastery to become its permanent inmates. Thereafter the formal initiation of the majority of them into sannyāsa according to Vedic rites, held sometime in the third week of January 1887, helped to consolidate the budding monastic organization further.

The hard austerities, characteristic of the life at Baranagore monastery, were an outward expression of the fire of intense renunciation and keen longing for God-realization that was raging in the hearts of the renunciates. We have a first hand report of their life from the lips of Swami Vivekananda. He said:

> We used to get up at 3 a.m. and after a wash — some after bath, and others without it — would sit in the worship room and become absorbed in japa and meditation. What a strong spirit of dispassion we had in those days! We had no thought even as to whether the world existed or not. Ramakrishnananda busied himself day and night with the duties pertaining to Sri Ramakrishna's worship and service, and occupied the same position in the Math as the mistress of the house does in a family. ... Know Ramakri-

> shnananda to be the central figure of the Math. There have been days when the Math was without a grain of food.... Boiled Bimba leaves, rice and salt — this was the menu for a month at a stretch. Oh, those wonderful days! The austerities of that period were enough to dismay supernatural beings, not to speak of men.[19]

There were days when their only clothes were a loin cloth and one presentable set of clothes in common to be worn by anyone who had to go to the city. They called themselves *danas*, the daredevil companions of Shiva. However crisis-crossed with harsh circumstances their life was, it could never cloud their minds. Being the spiritual children of the blissful childlike Sri Ramakrishna they maintained an attitude of indifference to material discomforts.

At times they would spend hours in the study of philosophy, religion, history, literature, and science. There were sessions of music and singing, of discussion and debate, and also of relaxation by indulging in light-hearted and witty banter. They would practise japa and meditation in the shrine, under a tree, in a cremation ground, or sometimes on the bank of the Ganga; some would spend day and night in contemplation. They put their heart and soul into obeying their Master's principle: 'First form character, first earn spirituality and results will come of themselves.'[20] The Math life centred round the worship room. Any perceptive mind could feel the Master's spirit working in a living form in the Math.

A strong sense of dispassion prompted some of them to take to the life of a wandering monk, visiting holy places and practising austerities at secluded sites. Some left the Math to lighten its financial burden, particularly after the passing away of Balaram Bose and Surendranath Mitra in 1890. Narendra too set out on his travels, initially for short periods, but finally, in July 1890 for a long period. Before he left he made an abortive attempt to procure land on the Ganga where 'Sriji' could be enshrined and worshipped and the monastic disciples could live together. Nevertheless, the monastery had already gathered momentum by this time. The loving care and hard labour of Swami Ramakrishnananda maintained the affairs of the Math in shape and spirit till Swami Vivekananda returned to the new location of the monastery at Alambazar on 19 February 1897.

By the last part of the Baranagore days the Movement had touched the heart of a number of educated young men. A group of college-going youths from the eastern part of Calcutta and another group of senior school students from Ahiritola began visiting the Math. A good number of them would be joining the Math in a few years' time.

During these days of hard struggle, most people, including some inmates of the Math, remained unaware of the quiet but significant role of Holy Mother. In her perception an organization of the monastic disciples of the Master was a prime necessity to carry on his mission. Though she herself was in distress, her love and sympathy for their ideal stood them in good stead. In her own words: 'Ah, how much I wept, how often I prayed to the Master!.... Oh, Master, you came down to earth, had fun with a few companions, and then departed in a happy mood. Was that the end of everything? I fervently pray to you that those who give up the world in your name may not lack simple food and clothes. Let them live together, with you and your teachings as their centre. Those who are afflicted with the sorrows of the world will come to them and obtain peace by listening to your teachings.'[21] This clearly indicates the purposeful sense of direction she had visualized for the Movement.

The renunciates could survive the severe privations because of their steadfast pursuit of the ideal, 'the tremendous faithfulness to each other, the tremendous love'[22] they had between themselves and the rich harvest of spiritual enlightenment everyone had. They came to realize that they were like pearls in a necklace held together by the thread of Sri Ramakrishna's pure love. The saga of hard austerities, spiritual disciplines, and transcendental experiences of the monks and of the unique community they had formed created a powerful tradition which continues to inspire the monks of the Order even today.

The Third Monastery at Alambazar

Swami Ramakrishnananda, the self-appointed *kothāri* (manager) of Baranagore Math, in consultation with other inmates of the Math, moved the monastery to Alambazar, half a mile to the north of the Dakshineswar temple, sometime in February, before Sri Ramakrishna's birthday on 28 February 1892.[23] The Math now had a fairly big two-storied building in two sections, outer and inner. Located in a prosperous locality, the spooky house, rented at

Rs.10 per month, was, however, shunned by local people. As in the past, Swami Ramakrishnananda used to perform the worship of Sri Ramakrishna. One eye-witness writes: 'His services would invoke a spirit of devotion even in the mind of a most atheistic person. Everybody could not but feel the living presence of the Master.' [24] A few monks spent some months at the monastery, while others went either on holy wanderings or practised austerities in solitary places, till they were called back to the monastery.

Swami Vivekananda's phenomenal achievement at the World's Parliament of Religions half a world away, held in September 1893, brought waves of wonder and awe to the inmates of the Math. His first letter dated 19 March 1894 addressed to his brothers of the Math made them jubilant and proud of their leader. This was followed by a series of letters which like guided missiles hit the monastery and exploded throwing splinters, spreading a fire of ideas. While Swamiji's ideas held all the monks in thrall, they could hardly understand his motive, particularly when he wrote: 'Let character be formed, and then I shall be in your midst. Do you see?' [25] But before the brotherhood could make their peace with those ideas, some monks, following Swamiji's hint,[26] successfully organized a public meeting of four thousand people in the Town Hall of Calcutta on 5 September 1894 for felicitation of Swamiji. A happy Swamiji wrote back to one fellow monk, 'Now you have come to know your powers' and to another, 'Can the words of the Master be untrue? Everyone of you has tremendous power.' In the same letter Swamiji made the prophetic statement, 'Consequently I have come to realize that I shall have to occupy a top position.'[27]

Swamiji kept a guiding hand on the affairs of the Math, including the annual public celebrations held in connection with the Master's birth anniversary. Introduced in 1881 with the consent of the Master, the monks joined hands with the householder devotees, and the annual celebration turned into a popular festival and an adequate forum for disseminating the Master's message.

The widespread news of Swamiji's achievement in the West had made him a national hero. When he returned, the proud and jubilant countrymen gave him a rousing welcome not seen before. The brotherhood at Alambazar also received him warmly. Swamiji, in turn, electrified them with his novel ideas. In the midst of joy and pride in his return, the brother-monks were besieged with awe and were distraught.

The period from 19 February 1897, when Swami Vivekananda joined the brotherhood at Alambazar, to 13 February 1898, when the Math was shifted to Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house, witnessed several happenings and also the interplay of some historical forces determining the Math's and the Movement's future course. Waves and ripples of changes, some at an ideational and others at a concrete level, agitated the minds of some inmates of the Math, who had perforce been satisfied with the contemplative life for so long.

Soon after his return to Calcutta Swami Vivekananda set himself to giving shape to some of his ideas as hurriedly as possible. The following were among his priorities: (a) streamlining of the Math life; (b) application of the ideal of neo-monasticism, and training of novices; (c) introduction of rules for guiding the Math life; (d) founding of the Ramakrishna Mission; and (e) organizing humanitarian service. These acts of Swamiji loom larger in retrospect than they did at the time, when they passed almost unnoticed or were not much appreciated. However, they brightened the image of the Ramakrishna Movement, for it had addressed some long-felt needs of the contemporary society.

Sri Ramakrishna had lived a great life and it was Swami Vivekananda's genius which read its meaning. He preached the same for the good of all in the language of the people, because that was the speciality of Sri Ramakrishna.[28] Moreover, Swami Vivekananda's perception of Sri Ramakrishna was unique. He once said: 'Sri Ramakrishna is a force...he is a power, living even now in his disciples and working in the world. I saw him growing in his ideas. He is still growing.'[29]

While reading the meaning of the words, thoughts, and deeds of his Master in depth, Swamiji made some valuable contributions. Here we mention some of them.

First, his priority was the principles Sri Ramakrishna stood for.[30] Those principles had great potential which could bring immense good to humanity.

Second, he propagated some teachings of the Master in his own language. As for example, whereas Sri Ramakrishna taught, 'He alone is a man whose spiritual consciousness has been awakened,' Swamiji preached that man was potentially divine and that the goal of man's life was to manifest that divinity.

Third, he discovered some extended meanings of some the Master's teachings: (a) He found that Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita are three stages of a continuum of spiritual growth in man. Each stage is necessary. (b) In Sri

Ramakrishna's acceptance of a woman as his guru, his practising spiritual discipline in a woman's garb and frame of mind, and his upholding women as representations of the Divine Mother, Swamiji found that his Master intended to help women rise from their degraded social state.

Fourth, his historical insight helped him appraise a deeper significance to his Master's life in the sense that even where Sri Krishna failed to harmonize the yogas satisfactorily, Sri Ramakrishna did. Swamiji propagated vigorously the ideal of '*yoga-samanvaya*' demonstrated in Sri Ramakrishna's life.[31]

Fifth, he applied some of his Master's teachings in the social context in his series of lectures entitled 'Practical Vedanta'. More importantly, he gave concrete expression to his Master's teaching, 'Serve God in man', through several programmes.

Sixth, within the ambit of his Master's teachings he made several experiments — e.g. to contest the orthodox view that man has to be led to the highest truth gradually through worship, prayer, and other prevalent religious practices, he started a centre at Mayavati in the Himalayas to approach the highest truth directly.

Seventh, Swamiji found that Vedanta as revealed in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna was potent enough to address all the major problems of modern man;[32] also he discovered that modern material progress could hold its own and at the same time approach spirituality by taking up the conclusions of Vedanta; and that Vedanta can squarely meet the challenges of modern science. On such considerations, Swamiji propagated the life and message of his Master in the garb of Vedanta.

From the above discussion none should, however, conclude that Swamiji had digressed from his Master. These ventures of Swamiji are somewhat like the resolution of the white light of his Master's message into the seven colours of the spectrum.

However important might have been Swami Vivekananda's contribution in giving shape to Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, his efforts could not have succeeded as they have done, had he not been backed up by Sri Sarada Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual consort. Whereas Swami Vivekananda took care of their rational presentation, Sarada Devi saw to their practical demonstration. She lent Vivekananda her moral support, and she provided unfailing inspiration to the Order of monks. She interpreted, at times, the Master's teachings and

offered her valuable guidance in times of difficulties. As the best manifestation of the ideal of 'Motherhood of God', her mighty mother's heart, a divine grace on earth, became the palpable Shakti or power behind the Movement. Along with this, the valuable contribution made by other direct disciples of the Master, monastic and lay, deserves due attention.

During the period under discussion the Ramakrishna Order of monks had undergone the 'birth pangs' of a complex social process involving further routinization of the charisma of Sri Ramakrishna and the continuation in altered form of his original religious experience.[33] The Order of monks witnessed the progression of these two interrelated factors.

The changed circumstances and waves of new thoughts that came from the leader shook the inmates in their shoes at the apprehension of their deviating from the ideal of monastic life. Now, a religious body, as it grows, has constantly to interpret and apply its goals, norms, and rules in different situations, although its 'focus of goals may be different, the specific set of norms may be different, the combination of norms into particular roles may be unique.'[34] After opposing some moves of the leader, the brotherhood set itself to honour his new ideas and priorities, for they were convinced that he was the conduit of their Master's ideas and powers. Also they remembered the leader's words, 'While I am on earth, Sri Ramakrishna is working through me.'[35]

Reorganization of the Math's Life-style

To create an environment congenial to implantation of the new ideas, the daily routine of the Math was systematized. A time schedule was introduced. New programmes like physical exercise according to Delsarte, religious classes for the public in the afternoon, question-answer sessions for monastics, etc. were added. The Madras centre too introduced a similar daily routine. To ensure continuance of the new programmes Swamiji kept a close watch. When he lived away from Calcutta he used to keep tabs on the Math through weekly reports. Primarily to guide the novices, Swamiji one day dictated a set of rules. These, along with some elaborate rules Swamiji formulated when the Math was located at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house, came to be known as 'Belur Math Rules'. Whenever he lived with the brotherhood he spent as much time and energy as possible in guiding the young monks individually

and collectively. Besides being a role model for others, Swamiji imparted to them bold ideas, sorted out their individual problems, and set before them a covetable goal, and even transmitted spirituality directly, whenever necessary.

In keeping with the spirit of the age Swamiji gave a new orientation to the traditional ideal of 'liberation of the individual self' cherished by monks by adding the clause 'and doing good to others'. Thereby he placed before the monks a new motto, which read, *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca*. Swamiji wanted to create a new order of monks who would renounce the world but would not thereby opt out of it; they would rather try, as part of their spiritual discipline, to relieve the distress of hapless people who suffer in their struggle in life.

Swamiji's long letter dated 27 April 1896 addressed to the brotherhood, considered as a sort of 'Magna Carta of the Ramakrishna Movement',[36] was a precursor to the 'root and branch' reform he later introduced in the Math life. Interestingly, however, this letter giving a comprehensive view of the Math envisioned by Swamiji did not suggest any humanitarian service. It seems probable that anticipating misunderstanding and opposition from his brother monks Swamiji introduced it only on his return to the brotherhood.

The Ramakrishna Mission Association

As hinted earlier Swami Vivekananda convened a meeting of monastic and lay devotees of the Master, numbering about 40, at Balaram Bose's house and founded the Ramakrishna Mission Association on 1 May 1897. A general body of members was drawn up consisting of all who, however differing with each other in other respects, had a common ground of unity in their love of Paramahamsa Deva and his teachings. Methods of work in India and in foreign countries were delineated. A branch was established in Calcutta and rules for its guidance were formed. Swami Vivekananda was elected General President of the Association. Swamis Brahmananda and Yogananda were elected President and Vice-President respectively of the Calcutta centre. N. N. Sen, Solicitor, was appointed Secretary and S. B. Ghosh and Sashi Bhusan Sarkar, Under Secretaries.

A question may be asked: Why did Swamiji establish the Mission over and above the Math? The question gains significance from the fact that not

only were these two terms, Math and Mission, often used interchangeably and the institutions engaged themselves in overlapping activities, but both of them overstepped their own limits at an ideational level too. Swami Gambhirananda rightly pointed out that the Ramakrishna Mission Association's 'very constitution involved it in monastic activities'[37] exclusively earmarked for the Math. The decision of the Mission Association adopted on 5 May 1897 that 'the activities of the Mission should be directed to the establishment of the Maths and Ashramas in different parts of India' provided scope enough to cover the intended aims of both the Math and Mission. There is no doubt, however, that the distinctiveness of the Math from the Mission was clear in Swamiji's mind. Swamiji wrote to Swami Brahmananda on 23 April 1898, 'We should hold an annual meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission, and also one for the Math.'

Though Math and Mission were legally separate, their interdependence continued to be a marked feature of the Ramakrishna Movement. In Swami Budhananda's idealistic vision, the Math and the Mission were two limbs of the Movement. By its limb of the Math, the Movement kept its firm grip over the timeless and essential traditions of India's spiritual culture, whereas by its other limb of the Mission it kept in touch with time, attended to the problems of humanity, and served the needy and hapless as part of the spiritual discipline of its members. The Math gave the Movement vertical ascension, the Mission horizontal diffusion. The Math provided the Movement spiritual stability and the Mission humanitarian dynamism.[38] It was only to emphasize the common source of the ideals of the Math and the Mission that the second President of the Math and the Mission, Swami Shivananda, observed, 'Any attempt to make a cleavage between the existing Math and Mission works is distinctly against the ideal of Swamiji and therefore stands self-condemned.'[39]

In the early days, all relief operations, preaching activities, and humanitarian services were done under the banner of the Ramakrishna Mission, the more popular of the two terms 'Ramakrishna Math' and 'Ramakrishna Mission'. The notable centre at Madras, now known as 'Sri Ramakrishna Math' was a Mission centre till 14 April 1913 when P. R. Sundera Aiyer, the trustee of the 'Ramakrishna Vivekananda Home, Madras', conveyed the land and building at Brodies Road to the 'Trustees of the Governing Body of the Association of the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur'. On a plot of land measuring little more than two acres to the west of Bull Temple Road, granted by the

Government of His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore for use of the Ramakrishna Mission there, the Ramakrishna Math was inaugurated on 20 January 1909 by Swami Brahmananda, President of the 'Ramakrishna Mission'.[40] The beautiful temple constructed at San Francisco in 1906 was declared to be the first Hindu temple of the Ramakrishna Mission in the USA. Thus for more than a decade after the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission Association in 1897, all the centres manned by the monastics of the Ramakrishna Order, except the principal centre at Belur, came to be known as Mission centres. Later some centres became Math centres, or Mission centres.

The monks of the Ramakrishna Order, its first generation selected and trained by Sri Ramakrishna himself, were, no doubt, the bulwark of the Math and the Mission, and for that matter of the Ramakrishna Movement. Belonging to the Dashanāmi sect of Hindu monasticism, the Ramakrishna Order is an autonomous monastic order with its own distinct objectives, traditions, and values. Committed to upholding the teachings and spirit of Sri Ramamkrishna, the Order is believed to be the mystical body of Sri Ramakrishna, God-incarnate. Since the monks have formed the nucleus of the Movement, it is their character, love for the ideal, and dedication to the cause which determine the growth of the Movement. Thus the first generation of the Ramakrishna Order of monks eventually created history and turned history into legend.

Relief Operations

Circumstances paved the way to give concrete expression to Swami Vivekananda's plan of work. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, India, once the land of plenty, had turned into a land of famine and pestilence. A wandering monk, Swami Akhandananda, was overcome on seeing the woe of a group of famine-stricken people in Mahula, Murshidabad. Learning of his predicament, Swami Vivekananda wrote him a letter of encouragement, and sent him two monastic hands and some money to start relief work. This is how organized relief service was first started at Mahula on 15 May 1897. Swamiji wrote to Miss Margaret Noble on 20 June 1897, 'It has acted like a miracle.'[41] This was followed by a series of relief operations at Deoghar (Bihar), Dakshineswar, and Dinajpur. As a result of the relief work at Mahula, an orphanage was started which became the origin of a Mission centre there.

Thereafter the plague relief and sanitary aid organized at Calcutta in 1898 through 1900 and at Bhagalpur in 1904 and 1905 drew much public attention. In 1899 the management of the plague relief service was placed in the hands of Sister Nivedita as Secretary and Swami Sadananda as officer-in-chief. Besides, during the period under review the Mission's famine relief at Khandwa in Madhya Pradesh in 1900, landslide relief at Darjiling in 1899, and earthquake relief at Dharmasala (Punjab) in 1905 deserve mention. Their impact on monks and other workers who participated, and also on society in general, helped to melt away the opposition from the traditionalists, monastic and lay. True to the claim of Swamiji, the monks of the Mission 'no longer have to argue to the people that *Ramakrishna is God*.'[42]

The Math at Nilambar Mukherjee's Garden House

The last year of the Math at Alambazar seems to have been a turning point. The wind of events blowing in the Math at Alambazar crossed the Ganga and turned the Math at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden into a hyperactive institution, in sharp contrast to the quiet hermitage that was Baranagore Math. While the ascetic impulse continued to dominate every aspect of life of the monastery, its inmates were busy in putting into practice the novel ideal of neo-monasticism, shaking off some of the traditional practices and prejudices. However, the brotherhood, including those seniors who had responded to the call of their leader with reservations, always stood by him, who was full of loving concern for every member of the community. A review of the happenings during this period reveals a vigorous interaction of various factors leading to the emergence of a clearer vision of the future of the Ramakrishna Movement, before the Math settled itself on its own land at Belur.

Happy to see the monastery at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house, with the Ganga flowing by, Swamiji remarked, 'This is the ideal kind of place for a Math.'[43] Sanctified by Holy Mother's stay, her practice of austerities, spiritual ministration, etc., the bank of the Ganga at Belur had already become a fertile ground for a new crop of spiritual life. Here the life pattern of the Math was similar to the one introduced in the last year of the Math at Alambazar, except that the management of the kitchen, marketing, the worship of Sriji in the shrine, cleaning of the premises, looking after guests, etc. were in the hands of

the young ones who had banded themselves into a group called the 'Brothers' Union'. The question-and-answer seesions held after the meditation hour in the evening were very popular. Weekly talks at Balaram Bose's house, and lectures by Swami Vivekananda, Swami Saradananda, Sister Nivedita, and Swami Ramakrishnananda and Swami Abhayananda in different places in India maintained the tempo of preaching work during that year.

In the midst of acacias, mangoes, coconuts, palms, neem trees, there was a half-ruined one-storeyed house in the northeastern corner of the newly purchased plot in Belur. It was remodelled into a two storied building to serve as the first monks' quarters at Belur and was consecrated by Holy Mother on 12 November 1898. The monks considered themselves blessed. Before the construction work was taken up Mrs Ole Bull, Miss MacLeod, and Sister Nivedita lived there for a couple of months. Another two-storeyed building was constructed to house the shrine, prayer hall, kitchen, refectory, etc. The newly built Math was consecrated on 9 December. A few months before, on 22 February 1898, Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was observed with eclat. The next Sunday, on 27 February, the public celebration was held in the nearby Radha Ramanji Thakurbari of Purnachandra Daw at Bally. The gathering was impressive. On the same day in the morning Swamiji had brought Sriji to the new site, performed puja and homa, and prayed along with all those present that Sri Ramakrishna, the great Avatar of this cycle, might, for *bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya* (for the welfare of all, for the happiness of all), reside in the site for a long time.

Though neo-monasticism admitted social concern within its purview, the spirit of tapasyā for disciplining the body, mind, and speech of the spiritual practitioners continued to be the main determinant of the new pattern of monastic life. Several monks took time to adapt themselves to the demands arising out of the complexity of the interplay between doctrine and experience. One significant demand was that the monks had to sacrifice their individual interest for the well-being of the community. Observing obedience was at a premium in a Hindu monastic organization. Swamiji frankly wrote one of his brother disciples:

> Above all 'obedience' and 'espirit de corps'. The work cannot succeed unless there is perfect obedience to the authority of the Order and sacrifice of individual views for the sake of the Order.[44]

Nilambar Mukherjee's Garden House

An early picture of the old shrine and monastery at Belur

Belur Math main building (old view)

The old shrine at Belur Math

In the Math life, personal beliefs and likes and dislikes gradually gave way to rationality and the democratic spirit. All this brought about greater cohesion in the brotherhood. Even as such modernization was introduced, the monks' primary source of inspiration continued to be Sri Ramakrishna. They proudly remembered an incident which Swami Premananda had recounted in his letter dated 15 August 1915 addressed to Swami Abhedananda. He wrote:

> Do you remember when you and I were together at the Cossipore garden-house, and the Master remarked, 'Your relationship is between Self and Self?' Do you remember what else he said? He said: 'You are monkeys and I am your Master. I hold in my palm the rope that binds you. If you try to make too much trouble and get out of my hand, I, your Master, will tighten the rope.' That is why I tell you, Brother, always remember we are the monkeys and he is holding us in his palm.[45]

Such faith more than anything else provided the fuel for propelling the Movement.

The Principal Centre

Before he left England for India, Swamiji intended to start three centres — in Calcutta, in Madras, and in the Himalayas, and later on another two centres in Bombay and Allahabad.[46] On his return to India he worked hard to have a Math on a permanent footing near Calcutta. He wrote in a letter in November 1897: 'It will ease me of my anxiety when a Math is established in Calcutta. Then I can hope that the work for which I struggled all my life through all sorts of privation and suffering will not die out after I cease to live in this body.'[47] Various attempts to secure a suitable site on the eastern bank of the Ganga failed. At last a plot measuring 22 bighas was purchased at Rs.39,200 in the village of Belur on the western bank. While Miss Henrietta Müller paid the major part of this amount, Mrs Ole Bull's handsome contribution made it possible to construct houses for a monastery.[48] Shifted to the new site on 2 January 1899, the Math in the normal course of events became the Headquarters of the Math and Mission.[49] Happily, Swamiji observed in his letter to Mary Hale in September 1899, 'I have now got a monastery on the Ganga for the teaching of philosophy and comparative religion and a centre of work.'[50] 'A

centre of work' is a fallout of the Mission Association, which had neither a building nor land of its own. Swamiji had a glorious vision of the future status of the Math. He felt that 'the power that will have its rise from here will flood the whole world, and turn the course of men's lives into different channels.'[51] He warned the then and future authorities of the Math that the Math on no account should become a traditional Thakurbari which does good to a few. The Math was to 'bring welfare to the whole world'.[52] He cherished the idea that the Math would gradually develop into a residential university which would provide general and technical education. On completion of education most of the graduates would go back to family life and those few recommended by the senior monks of the Order would be admitted into the Order. Thus Belur Math was to be the hub of a great movement. Placing the casket containing the sacred remains of Sri Ramakrishna's body, popularly known as *Ātmārāmer Kouṭā* or *Sriji*, on the Math grounds on 27 February 1898, Swamiji had worshipped Sri Ramakrishna, as has been mentioned earlier. Thus Sri Ramakrishna's *dharmakṣetra* was established.[53] Soon after the construction of the buildings was completed, the Bally Municipality slapped a heavy tax on the plea that it was the garden house of Swami Vivekananda. This was contested up to the Calcutta High Court which decreed in favour of the Math on 23 February 1901.

Development up to 1905

In the short period of five years, from 1897 to 1902, intercepted by his second lecture tour to the West for eighteen months, and a few lectures in India, and handicapped by the then killer disease, diabetes, Swami Vivekananda's contribution was invaluable to the growth of the Movement. During this short period of ministration he provided the vision of a great future for the Movement, reorganized the Order of monks set up by his guru, and set up an organization of monastic and lay devotees who believed in Sri Ramakrishna and his ideal. Considering the cultural and social realities as also the historical necessity, Swamiji placed before the followers of the Movement the novel motto of striving for personal salvation together with doing good to others. Also he suggested various programmes to realize the vision partly, if not fully. More than that he provided glowing inspiration to all. On his return from his

second visit to the West, even in his shattered health he devoted all his time and energy to consolidate the work already taken up and also to train the monks and novices. To vest the principal Math with legal authority to manage its affairs and take care of the growing organization, Swamiji made a Debottar Trust of the Math which was registered on 6 February 1901. Swamiji divested himself of all authority and appointed eleven of his brother disciples as trustees, who in turn elected Swami Brahmananda and Swami Saradananda President and Secretary respectively.

The rationale for the great emphasis he laid on the training of monks he has clearly explained. The Swami said: 'When people come into the world to serve an idea, Margot, they have to make their own material too. They must not expect to find people ready to listen.'[54] The Swami devoted time to training people of his choice.

Several institutions had come up in India, some of them well established and others in their early stages of growth. The centres at Belur, Madras, Mayavati in the Himalayas, and Sargachi were placed on sound footing. Blessed by Holy Mother, a girls' school was started by Sister Nivedita on 13 November 1898, which gradually flourished into a pioneering institution for girls' education. The Advaita Ashrama at Varanasi was his last handiwork. Inspired by Swamiji the centres at Allahabad, Kankhal, and Dhaka were in rudimentary stages of growth. Consequent to his two trips to the USA, the Vedanta Society of New York and the Vedanta Society of San Francisco came into existence.

Swamiji's passing away on 4 July 1902 cast gloom on the brotherhood. Its impact seemed to be so devastating that the monks forgot to take a photo of Swamiji lying in state. Nivedita wrote to Miss MacLeod on 16 July 1902: 'The Math is absorbed these days in weeping and in worship.' The monks however became aware soon that their love and faith in their leader should be vindicated by honouring the trust he had reposed in them. They must rise to the occasion and put heart and soul to live the ideal and propagate the same for the good of society. Swami Saradananda's letter dated 17 July 1902 states, 'Great changes are coming to us since his passing away.' His letter dated 24 July says, 'It will take a month or two more to readjust things here.' The untimely death of Swami Vivekananda forced Swami Brahmananda and Swami Saradananda to shoulder the prime responsibility of administering the

organization, but before they could saddle themselves satisfactorily, Swami Brahmananda became ill in March 1904.[55]

Nevertheless, the prediction of Dr. J. H. Barrows, the prime organizer of the World's Parliament of Religions 1893, 'You will see that Swami Vivekananda will not last, his work will come to naught,'[56] was proven wrong. A sudden spurt of enthusiasm among young men swept over different parts of the country. Amazed at this, Swami Saradananda wrote Miss MacLeod on 4 October 1902: 'It is one of those rare cases in history where the sacred seal of death made the cause to be consecrated and accepted more widely than when the worker was living. The young specially are showing much eagerness to accept him as the ideal.' The leaders of the Movement like Swami Saradananda, Swami Sadananda, Swami Satchidananda, Swami Shuddhananda, and Sister Nivedita responded. Institutions for the amelioration of poverty and illiteracy of their countrymen came up in different parts of the country. Swami Ramakrishnananda's letter dated 5 February 1903, addressed to Swami Abhedananda, mentioned this: 'Some Vivekananda Societies had already come into existence, some have just been born and some more are coming up in many places in India. The report of Swamiji's glories can be heard in all directions.'

Swami Brahmananda slowly recuperated his health but never afterwards got involved in the day-to-day administration. Nevertheless he successfully piloted the ship of the Movement towards its destination. A significant remark by Swami Saradananda will explain the position. He said, 'If Swami Vivekananda was loved and cherished by the Master as the means by which his spiritual mission was to be proclaimed to the world, Swami Brahmananda was no less valued by him as the future head of his organization.'[57] The tenure of the combined roles of Swami Brahmananda and Swami Saradananda constituted the golden period in which the Movement got consolidated and also expanded. During this period the ideal in essence remained intact, although the emphasis was shifted. Over-enthusiasm led many people to neglect the yoga of the 'modern *karma-yoga*' Swami Vivekananda had preached, and they took up *karma*, mere philanthropic activities, which did not lead to spiritual enlightenment. The new leadership tried to correct this and the result was immediate.[58] This balanced approach set the trend for the guidance of the Movement.

Characteristics of the Movement

Nourished by the four basic concepts — (i) man's real nature is divine, (ii) the aim of human life is to realize this divine nature, (iii) all historical religions are essentially in agreement, and (iv) lasting unity of mankind and peace can be achieved through the spiritual regeneration of man — the Ramakrishna Movement in the early years of its existence developed the following characteristics:

It is a religious movement. Its door is open to all irrespective of caste, creed, learning, or social standing. Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the Math and Mission, observed in 1899 that 'the Mission is distinct from all other religious missions of the past and the present as it only has discovered the harmony, the common basis, and necessity of all the various religions, whereas each of the religious missions of the world asserts its own infallibility, perfection, and supremacy over all the rest.'[59] Well known for its catholicity and universal outlook, the Movement has been looked upon as the voice of true Hinduism as also of the religious spirit of India.

The Movement is secular in the sense that while it denounces the concept of secularism as a philosophy of non-religion or anti-religion, it encourages everybody to practise his or her own religion and also tolerate and appreciate the merits of every other religion.

Aware of the dark history caused by the unholy alliance of religion with politics, the Movement keeps itself scrupulously free from active politics.

Even as it preserves a dual character — contemplative Math and socially-active Mission — the Movement looks upon religion as essentially a science of being and becoming.

The ideal of serving God in man, irrespective of his caste, creed, or language, is an integral part of the spiritual discipline of members of the Movement.

The motto of *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca* practised by the members of the Movement has resolved partially, if not fully, the age-old dichotomy between individual and society, as also between *pravṛtti mārga* and *nivṛtti mārga*.

The recent trend in the Ramakrishna Movement as seen in the growing number of Sri Ramakrishna temples and shrines, observed in rudimentary

form during the period under review, reveals the growing demand of the followers of the Movement for ritualistic worship of Sri Ramakrishna. Remembering the note of warning given by Swamiji, the leaders of the Movement are keeping close watch over this.

The Ramakrishna Movement, still small in its sweep but significant and promising in today's context, has drawn the attention of scholars of various hues. Here are some of their observations: One prominent disciple of the Master predicted in 1900, 'His [Sri Ramakrishna's] life has now only begun, and it is destined to shine through all men and women of the world in the near future.' Historian Kenneth W. Jones[60] observed that the restored Hinduism that Vivekananda wished for was not based on social criticism, but on selfless action by the dedicated followers of Ramakrishna, who find their salvation through social service and at the same time prove the superiority of their beliefs. This socio-religious movement is an aculturative movement. And as it proved its worth among the non-Hindus of the West under Swami Vivekananda's leadership, it stands out as the first Hindu movement to explore a totally new source of support.

Carl T. Jackson, in his book *Vedanta for the West*, observed, 'As a pioneer in paving the way for introduction of Asian religious conceptions in the West, the Ramakrishna Movement may be said to stand on the edge of one of the "megatrends" of modern world history.'[61]

The claim by certain quarters that Swami Vivekananda was a Hindu revivalist, conformist, or fundamentalist does not bear scrutiny. The Swami was very critical of social reform that was elitist in nature and inspired by foreign models spearheaded by the then reformers, based on social criticism and at times direct involvement in the programmes of some groups.[62] Swami Vivekananda's approach may be said to be the 'conscientization' of the weaker sections through the spread of education and spiritual culture, the perennial spring of their vitality. His dictum was, 'Let us put ideas into their heads, and they will do the rest.'[63] To keep the neglected masses and women out of the clutches of vested interests, Swamiji very much wanted them to come up and decide their own future. Further, because the Ramakrishna Movement is deeply rooted in the best of Indian cultural traditions, it could touch the hearts of so many in such a short time. Being liberal, it has kept its windows open to developments in science as well as organizational and management skills of

the West. Changes, if any, effected in the course of its development are superficial; its vitality as well as its basic character remains unaffected.

Whereas historian Sumit Sarkar opined in 1983 that the Ramakrishna Mission 'has proved an efficient philanthropic organization with no claims to social radicalism,'[64] Dr. S. Radhakrishnan remarked in 1975 that 'Sri Ramakrishna has helped to raise from the dust the fallen standard of Hinduism, not in words merely but in deeds also.'[65]

Historian Percival Spear alleged that the Ramakrishna Movement did not trigger off a mass movement because 'Ramakrishna's disciples too remained absorbed in the individual.'[66] But is this sufficient to explain the deficiency the author has pointed out?

George M. Williams, using all possible modern tools, has claimed in his erudite article entitled 'The Ramakrishna Movement: A Study in Religious Change' that 'The very success of the movement in physical terms has overtaxed the Order. It has begun to show signs of not coping fully with life's demands.'[67] Another conclusion of his reads, '...the Order is aging faster than it is currently filling its ranks.'[68] Needless to say, such scholastic squabbling is a result of the wishful thinking of vested interests without paying heed to facts.

Swami Brahmananda had written to an American lady on 28 June 1900: 'However, the beginning has been made, little as it is at present, and we hope to see the work thrive and prosper even in our life time.' His hopes were fulfilled. The achievements of the early phase of the Movement were undoubtedly prophetic to its future greatness.

This early period (1872-1905) reveals the morning glow of the Ramakrishna Movement which was to become a great influence for peace and happiness in this country as well as outside. The Movement is growing from strength to strength. Being aware that the solution of all human problems lies in man's becoming true men -- *mānhush*, in the words of Sri Ramakrishna — the ongoing Movement aims at producing a new type of man, pure in heart, rational in thought, unselfish in motivation, and enlightened by the experience of the unity of existence. It is encouraging to note that such men are increasing, though in small number, at the moment. The Movement is expanding by its inner strength, pointing out to the bewildered societies the desirable path towards the destination, which is nothing short of the spiritualization of mankind.

References

[1] Quoted from the proceedings of the meeting held on 5 May 1897.

[2] Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Convention, 1980, 79.

[3] *The Religions of the World* [Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1938], I: 82.

[4] Foreword to Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama]. Hereafter *History*.

[5] Hans Torwesten, *Ramakrishna and Christ*, trans. by John Phillips [1997], 209.

[6] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati Memorial Edition], V: 21 (Swamiji's letter dated 2 November 1893 addressed to Alasinga Perumal). Hereafter *Complete Works*.

[7] His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama], II: 166.

[8] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 November 1952. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's address at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.

[9] Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama], IV: 490.

[10] Swamiji wrote Mary Hale, 'Only one idea was burning in my brain — to start the machine for elevating the Indian masses....' (*Complete Works*, V: 136).

[11] Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math], 345.

[12] Ibid., 815.

[13] Ibid., 619.

[14] Ibid., 885.

[15] Swamiji once told Sister Nivedita: 'And mind this, Margot, it is when a half a dozen people learn to love like this that a new religion begins....Not till then.' (*Letters of Sister Nivedita*, ed. by Sankari Prasad Basu [Calcutta: Nababharat Publ. 1982], I: 174). Hereafter *Letters of Sister Nivedita*.

[16] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math], 931.

[17] Her Devotee-children, *The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math], 154.

[18] *Complete Works*, VI: 342.

[19] Ibid., VII: 248-49.

[20] Ibid., IV: 177.

[21] Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* [New York: Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre], 241.

[22] *Complete Works*, VIII: 82.

[23] Swami Shivananda's letter dated 6 May 1892 addressed to Pramadadas Mitra.

[24] *Udbodhan*, vol. 52, no. 11: 575.

[25] *Complete Works*, VI: 293.

[26] Ibid., 263 (Swamiji's letter).

[27] *Patravali* [Calcutta: Udbodhan], 251.

[28] *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, I: 59.

[29] *Complete Works*, V: 269.

[30] Ibid., 68.

[31] Ibid., IV: 106-07.

[32] Ibid., VIII: 140.

[33] Thomas F. O'Dea and Janet O'Dea, *The Sociology of Religion* [New Jersey: Prentice–Hall, 1983], 39.

[34] Ronald L. Johnstone, *Religion in Society* [New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 3rd ed. 1988], 57.

[35] *Complete Works*, VI: 330.

[36] *History*, 90.

[37] Ibid., 24.

[38] Swami Budhananda, *The Ramakrishna Movement: Its Meaning for Mankind* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1980], 24.

[39] Report of the First Convention, 34.

[40] *Prabuddha Bharata*, Feb. & Mar. 1909: 42.

[41] *Complete Works*, VIII: 406.

[42] Ibid., VI: 403.

[43] Ibid., VII: 122.

[44] Ibid., IX: 99.

[45] Swami Abhedananda, *Patra–samkalan* [1st ed.], 22.

[46] *Complete Works*, V: 123-24.

[47] Ibid., VI: 414.

[48] Swamiji's letter to Mary Hale dated 16 March 1899.

[49] Swamiji wrote as early as 2 May 1895: 'The Calcutta Math is the main centre; the members of all other branches must act in unity and conformity with the rules of that centre' (*Complete Works*, V: 79). Interestingly, for the Mission 1 *bigha* 14 *katha* of land adjacent to the Math land was purchased on 20 April 1928.

[50] Ibid., VIII: 473.

[51] Ibid., VII: 157.

[52] *History*, 111.

[53] *Complete Works*, VII: 116.

[54] *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, I: 155.

[55] Swami Saradananda, in his letter dated 5 December 1904 wrote concerning Swami Brahmananda, 'His long illness has left him not even the strength of a child.'

[56] *Harvest Field*, Aug. 1902, editorial entitled 'The Late Swami Vivekananda' (from the collection of Prof. Sankari Prasad Basu).

[57] Swami Prabhavananda, *Eternal Companion* [Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1970], 51-52.

[58] Editorial 'Founding of the Ramakrishna Mission', *Prabuddha Bharata*, Sept. 1956: 364.

[59] Swami Brahmananda's letter dated October 1899.

[60] *The New Cambridge History of India* [New Delhi: Foundation Books], III: 45-46.

[61] Carl T. Jackson, *Vedanta for the West* [Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994], 145.

[62] By way of example we quote from Fidelis de Sa, *Crisis in Chota Nagpur* [1975], 339-40: 'The Missionary must strive to eliminate the basic causes of sufferings in the lives of the people and to alter a general situation in society that permits the unjust grinding down of a class of people.'

[63] *Complete Works*, VIII: 307.

[64] Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India (1885-1947)* [Bombay: Macmillan India Ltd., 1986], 72.

[65] S. Radhakrishnan in his Introduction to *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. I [Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1975], xxxvi.

[66] *A History of Modern India* [Penguin Books], II: 165.

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The Second Phase of Ramakrishna Movement (1906-1936)

CONSOLIDATION OF THE WORK

SWAMI VIMALATMANANDA

The Glorious Period

THE PREMATURE DEATH of Swami Vivekananda, the leader of the Ramakrishna Movement, was no doubt a severe blow to his brother disciples, other monks, and devotees, but the Movement made steady progress under the enlightened leadership of Swami Brahmananda (1902-1922), Swami Shivananda (1922-1934), and Swami Akhandananda (1934-1937). Swami Saradananda, a very balanced personality and an indefatigable worker, carried on the activities as the General Secretary till 1927. The other nine direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who were with them were the lighthouses of the Movement. Their spirituality, austerity, renunciation, dedication, devotion to work, pure lives, firm faith in the ideal, universal outlook, sympathetic attitude, obedience to the leader, and absolute dependence on Sri Ramakrishna aided the spontaneous growth of the Movement and put it on solid ground. They were a perennial source of inspiration and living examples of the ideals of the Movement to all.

Above all, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was the supreme living spiritual authority who guided, shaped and directed the Movement till 1920. Her words were law to the direct disciples and other monks. Her spiritual ministry helped the diffusion of the ideas and ideals of the Movement far and near through the Divine Power she embodied.[1]

The various activities of the Movement in the second phase showed all-round progress — spiritual, educational, medical, cultural and general. Our countrymen took a greater interest in the Movement, which was by then recognized, accepted, and praised as one of the nation-building movements in India. At this time the Movement had seventy-three branch centres throughout the world and attached to these were nine sub-centres. This period was full of remarkable events — a golden era. The second phase can be said to be the most important and glorious period in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement.

Registration of the Ramakrishna Mission

With the growth of the Movement's scope and public responsibilities, it was found necessary to have a separate organization with its own constitution for the efficient carrying out of the work and for giving it a legal status. Accordingly, a society under the name 'Ramakrishna Mission' was registered on 4 May 1909 under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860. The management of the Mission was vested in a governing body consisting of the Trustees of Belur Math for the time being. The first governing body consisted of twenty monks — Swamis Brahmananda, Advaitananda, Saradananda, Premananda, Shivananda, Akhandananda, Trigunatitananda, Subodhananda, Abhedananda, Turiyananda, Shuddhananda, Bodhananda, Atmananda, Sachchidananda-I, Virajananda, Achalananda, Mahimananda, Shankarananda, Dhirananda, and Nirbhayananda. Of these, Swami Brahmananda became the President, Swami Advaitananda Vice-President, Swami Premananda Treasurer, Swami Saradananda Secretary, and Swami Shuddhananda Accountant.[2] The Mission was based broadly on democratic principles, in which the membership was open to householders (called lay members) who had the right to vote at the annual general meetings of the Mission.

Though the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Math, with their respective branch centres, are distinct organizations, there has been a close association between the two, as the members of the Governing Body of the Mission are the Trustees of the Math, and both have their headquarters at Belur Math. The name 'Ramakrishna Mission' has, however, come to be loosely used by people in connection with all Math activities also.

Expounders and Exemplifiers of the Ideals and Ideas of the Movement

As the Movement came out from its shell of childhood and subsequently entered adulthood, there were doubts, misunderstandings, and misconceptions amongst some of the monks and the newly joined brahmachārins as well as devotees about the ideals and ideas, particularly the idea of Nara-Nārāyana Sevā — 'serving man as God', the practical application of Advaita Vedanta. They could not accept work as worship whole-heartedly. But Holy Mother and some of the direct disciples came forward to remove all these doubts by their words of explanation and lives.

Once in 1912 at Udbodhan, a disciple of Holy Mother said to her: 'Some say that it is not good for the Sadhus (of the Ramakrishna Order) to work in the Sevashramas (Homes of Service) and dispensaries or to be pre-occupied with selling books, accounting and so forth. Did the Master ever undertake such activities? Work of this kind is thrust upon the seekers who enter the Order with a yearning for the realization of God. If anyone must do some work, it must be worship in the shrine, meditation, japa and devotional music. Activities other than these entangle one in desires and turn one away from God.' Holy Mother replied with great firmness:

> You must pay no heed to those who talk in that manner. What will you do day and night if you are not engaged in work? Can one practise meditation and japa for twenty-four hours? You referred to the Master. His case was different.... you are able to get your food because you are doing some work. Otherwise you would have to roam from door to door begging for a morsel of food. Perhaps you would fall ill. Besides, where are people today to give alms to the Sadhus? Never pay any heed to such words. Things will go on as the Master directs. The Math will run on these lines. Those who cannot adjust themselves will go away.[3]

Holy Mother did not stop at this but illustrated it in her own life also. She was very much interested in all branches of service of the Movement and encouraged the monks, brahmachārins and devotees of the centres which she visited. She herself even established a school and a dispensary at her birthplace, Jayrambati.

Swami Brahmananda, a God-intoxicated man, used to clarify the ideal of selfless service, of serving God in man, by calling it a form of worship. He also used to point out that without the practice of meditation it is hard to do work as worship and that it is utterly impossible to annihilate the ego simply by actions, however selfless they may be. He left a deep impression on the minds of the novices when he said:

> Instead of working for yourself, work for the sake of the Lord. Know that the work you have to do is Sri Ramakrishna's and Swami Vivekananda's. If you can work with this idea, your work will not bind you. On the other hand, it will improve you in every way, spiritually, morally, intellectually and also physically.[4]

He used to visit the branch centres spread all over India, stay a few months at each place, and inspire everyone by his presence. He collected money for the construction of Sevashramas and he himself founded the Bhuvaneswar centre for service to the people of Orissa.

Swami Saradananda, as Secretary, worked out the policies and safely piloted, through many trying situations, the activities of the Movement on the lines clearly laid down by Swamiji, under the guidance and inspiration of Holy Mother and the leadership of the President of the Order. He was so much loved and held in esteem by the monastic and lay workers that his slightest desire was executed with utmost veneration. Along with seeing to the personal needs of the Holy Mother and her large retinue and the administration of the Organization, Swami Saradananda built Mother's residences and memorial temples at Jayrambati, Calcutta, and Belur Math. He wrote the comprehensive biography of Sri Ramakrishna, supervised the *Udbodhan* magazine, edited Swamiji's books, and thus set an example for the Movement.

Swamis Premananda, Shivananda, Ramakrishnananda, Akhandananda, Vijnanananda, Advaitananda, Trigunatitananda, Abhedananda, Turiyananda, Adbhutananda, and Subodhananda combined to put the Movement squarely on the solid foundation of spirituality. They all propagated and advocated the ideas and ideals of the Movement to the brahmachārins, monks, devotees, and public. Swamis Premananda and Shivananda took the responsibility of moulding the lives of the newly joined brahmachārins at Belur Math. By precept and example, in time and out of time, both the Swamis inculcated the true

spirit of Swamiji's new *karma-yoga* in the minds of the youngsters including the novices. Swami Ramakrishnananda founded the Math and Students' Home in Madras and Bangalore and spread the ideas and ideals of the Movement in South India, Bombay, and Rangoon. Swami Akhandananda spent much of his life in the remote village of Sargachi (Murshidabad District., West Bengal) to exemplify the *sevā dharma* of the Movement. Swami Vijnanananda founded a centre in Allahabad and supervised the construction work of the Kankhal and Varanasi Sevashramas, and the Sri Ramakrishna temple at Belur Math. Swami Advaitananda viewed the vegetable gardening work as the worship of Sri Ramakrishna and supervised it at Belur Math. Swami Trigunatitananda built the first Hindu temple on the soil of America and died in that land. Swami Abhedananda preached Vedanta in Western countries for the long period of twenty-five years. Swami Turiyananda, the lion of Vedanta, built the Almora Ashrama, and wherever he lived he inspired everyone to do 'Nara-Nārāyana Sevā'. Though Swami Adbhutananda did not participate in the active work of the Movement, he was very vocal in spreading Swamiji's ideals. Apart from famine relief work on the Chilka islands in Orissa in 1908, Swami Subodhananda could not personally work much, but he would inspire people to do the work started by Swamiji.

A Great Event — The First Convention, 1926

One of the important events in the second phase of the Movement was the first Convention which was held at Belur Math from 1st to 7th April 1926. Over a hundred affiliated and non-affiliated centres were represented and nearly 350 representatives and guests were assembled at the convention. The following report gives us some idea of the origin of this Convention:

> With the lapse of this brief but eventful space of forty years, the activities of the Movement had grown so complex and multifarious that many among the members, both lay and monastic, felt the necessity of an occasion for all to meet together to take stock of the situation, to compare notes with each other and to lay down broad principles for future guidance. This feeling found a formed and definite expression at the extraordinary General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission held on the 2 June 1925. It was at this meeting

that the idea of a Convention of all members and workers of the Math and Mission was first proposed. The members present one and all enthusiastically greeted the proposal as affording them an opportunity to exchange ideas, consolidate their faith in the ideal and infuse new vigour into its practice, and further to strengthen the tie of fellowship and cooperation amongst themselves.[5]

The Convention was not meant to solve any specific problem of the Movement, but to chalk out some programme. The sole responsibility of the entire Convention was entrusted to a Reception Committee whose chairman and secretary were Swamis Saradananda and Shuddhananda respectively. It was a grand success. The members of the different fields of work of the various branch centres met together for the first time. The admirers and devotees from different parts of India and abroad representing different social backgrounds gave expression to the ideal of the spiritual life lived by Sri Ramakrishna and illustrated by Swamiji.

The direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna — Swamis Shivananda, Saradananda, Akhandananda, and Subodhananda — and other illustrious monks and scholars deliberated on the ideas and ideals of the Movement in different sessions. The thought-provoking speech of Swami Shivananda, President of the Convention, was also read out. Fourteen excellent speeches were delivered and thirteen instructive papers were read out at the Convention. Swami Saradananda, in his welcome address clearly pointed out the life and strength of the Movement and also sounded a note of caution. He said, in a distinct, impressive, and sonorous voice on the first day:

> It seems to be the invariable rule that every newly started movement should pass through the two stages of opposition and indifference before its principles are accepted by the society and humanity at large.... The Ramakrishna Movement had passed through the two stages of opposition and indifference a few years before the time when its great leader, Swami Vivekananda, left us after giving it a working shape and organization in the name of Ramakrishna Mission. Since then it has been working steadily along that line for the last quarter of a century and has brought itself to that point, at present, where it has found recognition and acceptance in the hearts of the people of India and of several countries abroad.... But still greater works

remain yet to be accomplished, and the Master and Swami will do it all in time, even through you, if you keep close to their purity and singleness of purpose, their sacrifice and self-surrender for all that is good, true and noble, and follow their footsteps with that meek and humble spirit with which you have followed them.[6]

This is the guide of the Movement even now. For the efficient management of the Movement, nine resolutions prepared by the Subjects Committee were passed and sent by the Convention to the Board of Trustees and the members of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission as recommendations. Swami Gambhirananda commented on these:

As for the resolutions themselves, while they represented real problems and aspirations, they had no constitutional sanction, and so amounted to mere 'suggestions'. They were also accepted as such, for though good in themselves, many of them could not be put into practice immediately.[7]

At the concluding session on 7 April, Swami Saradananda, while accepting these resolutions, reminded the representatives very clearly:

The one thing that I now want to impress upon you is that you should think and think over the resolutions you passed yesterday and should try, everyone of you, faithfully to give effect to them when you are all back at your respective centres of activity.[8]

At last, the resolutions, with some modifications, were adopted by the Trustees and the Governing Body of the Math and Mission.

The Role of Lay Devotees and Admirers in the Movement

Swami Budhananda rightly observed in his book on the Ramakrishna Movement:

It will be a great mistake to think that the Ramakrishna Movement grew from an inchoate stage to strength and then from strength to strength exclusively through the self-application of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. As far as the Mission is concerned, from the very start it was, even officially, a joint effort of the monastic and lay followers of Sri

> Ramakrishna. Indeed his lay disciples made incalculable contributions to the growth of the Movement as a whole, and not exclusively to the Mission alone.[9]

This continued in the second phase also. Sri Girish Chandra Ghosh, Mahendranath Gupta, Akshay Sen, Chunilal Basu, Devendranath Majumdar, Manindra Gupta, Paltu (Pramath Kar), Chhota Naren (Narendranath Mitra), and others who were the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna played a vital role in the growth of the Movement in different capacities. Girish's unceasing support, Mahendra's (M's) literary genius, Deven's musical talent, Paltu's and Chhota Naren's legal assistance, etc. benefited the Movement at large. Besides, a large number of admirers and devotees served the Movement silently and became its support.

Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma, Gauri-ma and other women disciples of Sri Ramakrishna made substantial contributions to the Movement in their unswerving loyalty to Sri Ramakrishna and personal service to Holy Mother. Most of them did not do anything publicly, but they each lived a pure life to set an example to the Movement.

In the second phase, also the Western and the Eastern disciples and admirers of Swamiji extended their helping hands in their own ways for the growth of the Movement in India and abroad. Alasinga Perumal, Dr. Nanjunda Rao, Ramu, Ramanuja and others took up the task of assistance. Swami Ramakrishnananda was able to put the Movement on the cause of women's welfare in India. Mrs. C. E. Sevier was instrumental in publishing Swamiji's *Life* and *Complete Works* in English from the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama. Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss Josephine MacLeod, Mrs. Francis Leggett, and others looked after the financial side of the Movement and got Swamiji's books printed in the West. Miss Ida Ansell, Sister Devamata, the Mead Sisters, and others dedicated their lives to the Vedanta Movement in the United States, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. The French savant Romain Rolland's books on Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda created a great stir in the Western countries. And the speeches of Jean Herbert, the French philosopher, made a deep impression on the minds of intellectuals. Innumerable other admirers and devotees of the West helped the Movement flourish both in the West and in India.

Tribulations and Struggles

The sign of growth of any movement, or acceptance of any movement by the public, is recognized by the amount of tribulations and struggles it faces. In the second phase, the Movement had to pass through hurdles of the First World War, political pressure, the Government's displeasure, the freedom movement's demands, and the social forces of disruption. The last one was an internal struggle and the others external. But the Movement took up the challenge to overcome these difficulties and emerged strong and firm in its faith and solidarity.

The freedom fighters, anarchists, revolutionists, and national leaders adored Swami Vivekananda as their leader. They considered Swamiji to be a great patriot of India and all of them were inspired by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. They had also close association with the Movement. The police always found books on these two great souls when they searched the houses of the revolutionists. The Government was eager to find the existence of any secret motive of the Mission. It used to watch the workers of the Mission in silence and would open foreign letters addressed to Belur Math.

The Government's suspicion became worse at the time of the partition of Bengal with 'Swadeshi' vows and 'Videshi' boycott in 1906, when the whole country was torn by different political views. The Mission authorities smelt indiscretion, trouble, and tribulation at the very beginning of this agitation. They had to take some firm steps to protect the Movement and had to move the Mission along its own chosen path without fear and hesitation. But it came to the knowledge of the Mission authorities that the political agitators, anarchists, and revolutionists were using the good name of the Ramakrishna Mission and wrongly interpretating Swamiji's teachings in order to pervert the minds of young men and women. Therefore, to remove the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the Movement's ideals, the Mission authorities had to publish a very serious warning to the public in almost all the newspapers of India in April 1914.[10]

Though the first Governor of Bengal, Mr. T. D. Baren Carmichael, publicly praised in Dhaka and at the Town Hall, Calcutta, in 1916, the Mission's work, the Mission authorities were astonished to find distrust and suspicion in Governor Carmichael's Durbar speech at the Government House, Calcutta, on 11

December 1916. On the advice of the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, Swami Saradananda met the Governor with the help of Miss MacLeod and clarified the Mission's stand, submitting a memorandum to him on 22 January 1917.[11] Realizing the truth, Mr. Carmichael wrote back to the Mission on 26 March 1917:

> I have full sympathy with the real aim of the true Ramakrishna Mission and it was this abuse of the name of the Mission that I wish to prevent. I hope the words I used will help the Mission to guard against the illegitimate use of its name by unscrupulous people.[12]

Thus the Movement was saved from the ill will of the Government.

When the whole country was agitating under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi against the British Government in 1922 for political independence, many admirers and devotees wondered at the refusal of the Ramakrishna Mission to participate in it. At this critical period, though Swami Shivananda, the President of the Order, recognized the unique spirit of service, fortitude, and sacrifice of Mahatma Gandhi and sympathized with the freedom movement, he firmly said about the stand of the Math and Mission:

> I told you at the outset that we are working in our own way in accordance with our own ideal — an ideal formulated and left us by the far-sighted sage Swami Vivekananda. Before his illumined vision was revealed the picture of the next thousand years — not merely of India but of the entire world. He saw everything clearly and chalked out a definite policy for us to follow.[13]

Among the internal struggles, one was created by Ganendranath of the Udbodhan Office in Calcutta in 1929 and another by Swami Nirmalananda of Bangalore in South India in 1935. These two tribulations damaged the prestige of the Movement very much. Many monks left the Order and formed new maths of their own. Many devotees joined the hostile groups. But the Mission authorities tackled both situations with a firm hand. The first one was resolved by the Mission's solicitors and the second was settled in court.[14] These kinds of tribulations and struggles are quite natural for any organized movement. Most people knew this and also soon forgot it. They appreciated the activities of the Math and Mission and supported it with men and money as usual. Regarding the Ganendranath affair, Swami Shivananda stated in 1929:

> The Master gives a shaking to his Order now and then to awaken its dormant power of collective effort and to show that his work cannot be carried out by anyone individually; it must be performed by the monks of this Order in unison, and then only will it be well done. The more storms and stresses there will be, the more the power of the Master's Order (*sangha-shakti*) will be roused. All superior achievements have to pass through many tribulations. The more obstacles there are, the greater will be the love and faith in all hearts for the Master, and the more sincere will be the reliance on Him.... This work of ushering in a new order of things will continue to progress for centuries; nobody will be able to arrest its course. These are the words of Swamiji himself, who was a *rishi*, seeing the past, present, and future.[15]

A Survey of the Service Activities during the Second Phase

The second phase left a glorious record of all-round progress of the Movement. We recall Swami Gambhirananda's remark:

> Nevertheless, the monks felt the need of ordering the affairs of the Math and Mission in a more business-like way, as had so often been advocated by Swami Vivekananda. It is true that the ideas and ideals are the very life of a new movement, and it is this that ultimately determines its success. But as the soul requires a body so does an ideology, specially under present day conditions, require concrete expression through cooperative effort to make itself more effective.[16]

In this phase, seventy-three new branch centres were added to the organization in India and abroad. Thirteen centres were founded in the USA, South America, Europe, Ceylon, and Singapore. Some talented and scholarly monks from India such as Swamis Bodhananda, Prakashananda, Paramananda, Nikhilananda, Akhilananda, Vividishananda, Gnaneswarananda, Ashokananda, Prabhavananda, Devatmananda, Vijayananda, Avyaktananda, and Bhaswarananda took the responsibility of holding the banner of Vedanta in the West. Swami Yatiswarananda was sent to Europe at the earnest request of Vedanta students in 1933 and he was very successful. Swami Adyananda was deputed to South America in 1935.

Medical centres at Vrindavan, Calcutta (Seva Pratishthan), Rangoon, Delhi, Lucknow, Ponnampet, etc. were in their initial stages. In course of time, these centres became prestigious hospitals. Educational institutions like the Calcutta Students' Home, Deoghar Residential School, schools at Sarisha, Cherrapunji, Baranagore, Jamshedpur, Coimbatore, Mysore, Thrissur, Chinglepet, and Malda were started in urban, rural, and tribal areas. Later these were transformed into big educational complexes. Swamis Keshavananda, Nirvedananda, Sadbhavananda, Prabhananda (Ketaki Maharaj), Ganeshananda, Tyagishananda, Dayananda, and others were the pioneers in the fields of education, health care, and tribal services.

Other centres for general services were started at Kanpur, Midnapore, Katihar, Rangoon, Patna, Barisal, Faridpur, Bombay, Dhaka, Sylhet, Bankura, Mymensingh, Contai, Narayanganj, Sonargao, Jayrambati, Tamluk, Habiganj, Baliati, Nagpur, Ooty, Rajkot, Dinajpur, Almora, Shyamalatal, Nattarampalli, Chandipur, Bagerhat, Puri, Garbeta, Jamtara, Kishenpur et al. The publication section of Mayavati was shifted to Calcutta. Holy Mother's temples at Jayrambati and Belur Math, and Swamiji's and Brahmananda's temples were dedicated. Holy Mother's permanent residence in Calcutta was erected.

Five more magazines were started — published from Madras, Thrissur, and America, in Tamil, Malayalam, and English respectively. In addition to all these, quite a number of books came out in English, Bengali, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, German, and French from centres such as Advaita Ashrama, Udbodhan, Madras Math, Mysore, Bangalore, Thrissur, Kalady, and from Europe and America.

In the second phase, the number of institutions was as follows: seven indoor hospitals, forty-two out-patient dispensaries, twenty-four students' homes, three residential schools, six high schools, three industrial schools, six M. E. schools, forty-seven upper and lower primary schools, fifteen night schools, three orphanages, and five Sanskrit *catuśpāṭhis*. The welfare section of the Headquarters used to help a number of helpless widows and give stipends to deserving students every year.[17]

Famine, flood, plague, epidemic, cyclone, tornado, fire, riot, water scarcity, and clothing relief were conducted by Belur Math and by the branch centres in different places from 1906 to 1936 involving a large amount of money.

When the Mission was legally registered, ten direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and ten other monks were elected members of the Governing Body. During the second phase, from time to time, young talented monks were included in the list of Trustees and the Governing Body: in 1906, Swami Virajananda; in 1922, Swamis Vishuddhananda, Madhavananda, and Amriteswarananda; in 1928, Swamis Yatiswarananda, Kalikananda, Raghavananda, Asimananda, and Atmabodhananda; 1929, Swamis Atmaprakashananda, Nirvanananda, Vireswarananda, Nirvedananda, Omkarananda, Shantananda, and Prabodhananda. Afterwards Swamis Kalikananda and Raghavananda voluntarily withdrew from the trusteeship. The lives of these young monks were moulded at the feet of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. They led the Movement in different capacities in later years. Around this time, the word 'Assistant Secretary' was substituted for 'Joint Secretary'.

According to the suggestion of the younger monks at the 1926 Convention, Belur Math authorities formed a Working Committee of twelve members to assist the Trustees and the Governing Body of the Math and Mission.

In April 1935, the first Monks' Conference was held at Belur Math to formulate the elaborate rules for the Organization. Swami Shuddhananda, as the President of the Conference, pointed out:

> In view of the expansion of the activities of the Math and the Mission, it is necessary to see that the rules framed by Swamiji are put into practice in conformity with the requirements of the time.[18]

After deliberation in the Conference, the rules adopted and sanctioned were known as the Rules and Regulations of the Ramakrishna Order, 1935.

The Irreparable Losses

Though the second phase (1906-1936) was the golden period of the Movement, it also witnessed the passing away of stalwarts of the first generation of the Math and Mission. Each of them exercised a powerful influence, direct or indirect, over the activities of the Movement, and their loss to the Movement is irreparable.

Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, who passed away on 21 July 1920, was a perennial source of comfort and inspiration to one and all. Swami Brahmananda

passed away on 10 April 1922. He nurtured and developed the infant organization. Swami Premananda, the 'Mother' of Belur Math, passed away on 30 July 1918. Swami Adbhutananda's purity, renunciation, and unlearned wisdom made him a marvel of the age. He passed away on 24 April 1920. Swami Turiyananda, who passed away on 21 July 1922, was a remarkable synthesis of the higher ideals of religion, past and present. Swami Saradananda, the chief executive, was the living embodiment of the ideal of the *Gita* in the modern age. He passed away on 6 August 1927. Swami Shivananda left his mortal coil on 20 February 1934. His life was like a light for the dark recesses of history. Swami Ramakrishnananda, who passed away on 21 August 1911, was a beacon light to South India. Swami Trigunatitananda's life was devoted to the spiritual unfoldment of man. He passed away on 10 January 1915. Swami Advaitananda made strenuous effort to mould his life according to the life and example of Sri Ramakrishna. He left his mortal coil on 28 December 1909. Swami Subodhananda's last prayer was that the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna be always on the Order. He passed away on 2 December 1932. The deaths of Girish Ghosh, Master Mahasay (M), Chunilal Basu and other lay devotees were also great blows to the Movement.

The Happy End of the Second Phase of the Movement

We have come to the end of the second phase of the Movement. Indeed it was a happy end. Swami Gambhirananda rightly observed:

> The Sri Ramakrishna birth Centenary [was] the best achievement of the decade...for it was an event by itself. It crowned half a century of trials and tribulations, delays and advances, and battles and victory.... A hundred years had now passed since his birth in the distant village of Kamarpukur on February 18, 1836. It was in the fitness of things that his followers should make this an occasion for world-wide joy and a fresh attempt to propagate his message. For after this experience of half a century, they were convinced that in it lay the panacea for the ailments of the world. Sri Ramakrishna was verily the prophet of the age.[19]

The centenary celebrations began on 24 February 1936 and continued for a whole year. A befitting tribute to the year-long centenary celebrations

was the erection of the magnificent stone temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math. The plan of this temple was originally drawn up by Swami Vijnanananda according to the ideas of Swami Vivekananda. It was the dream of Swamiji and other monks. To fulfill this, Swami Shivananda laid the foundation stone on 13 March 1929, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna, but the authorities were not able to start the construction then due to lack of funds. Five more years passed, and also Swami Shivananda was no more. In 1934 a very handsome offer came from Miss Helen Rubel (Bhakti) and Mrs. Anna Wooster (Annapurna), Vedanta students of Swami Akhilananda, then head of the Vedanta Society of Providence, USA. These two devoted students gladly offered to donate a large amount of money towards the construction of the temple.

The sole responsibility for the construction of the temple fell upon the shoulders of Swami Vijnanananda. Martin Burn Co. of Calcutta was entrusted to take up the work. The design was approved by the Math authorities. The rough estimate was six lakhs of rupees. The primary work of construction was started on 10 March 1935. On the advice of the engineers, the foundation site was shifted a hundred feet away from the original spot. Swami Vijnanananda relaid the foundation stone on the auspicious day of Sri Guru Purnima, 16 July 1935, in the presence of a large number of monks, brahmachārins, and devotees. The metal box containing the inscription was taken out from the old site and placed at the new. On that day a special worship of Sri Ramakrishna was performed followed by readings from various scriptures and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, as well as Rāmanāma-sankirtana and other devotional songs.[20]

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[16] *History*, p. 249.

[17] *Eighth General Report of the Ramakrishna Mission (1934-1935)* [November 1936], p. 4.

[18] *History*, p. 262.

[19] Ibid., p. 267.

[20] *The Vedanta Kesari*, May 1989, pp. 183-185.

The Third Phase of Ramakrishna Movement (1936-1950)

PERIOD OF GROWTH OF THE MOVEMENT

SWAMI BALABHADRANANDA

POINTING TO BELUR MATH, the site of the Ramakrishna Mission's headquarters, Swami Vivekananda once said that the spiritual waves that would rise from there would gradually inundate the whole world and last for at least fifteen hundred years. The Ramakrishna Movement is only one hundred years old, and the Order bearing Sri Ramakrishna's name is not very big in terms of the number of centres it has. Still, within a hundred years this Movement has earned great respect by virtue of the humane and catholic ideals it preaches.

The focus of this article will be confined to a particular period of the Movement — from 1936, the Birth Centenary year of Sri Ramakrishna, to 1950, a few years after India's independence. The General Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission for the year 1936-37 shows that there were 50 Mission centres and 59 Math centres in India and abroad, which proves that there had been considerable growth in the preceding thirty-nine years. And the services rendered by the Mission during this period were mainly in the fields of pre-college education, medical aid, and relief.

Birth Centenary of Sri Ramakrishna

The most important event of this period was the Birth Centenary of Sri Ramakrishna. Though Sri Ramakrishna had passed away in 1886, his message

was still alive in the Order bearing his name, the Order which he himself had conceived of, and which his able disciple Swami Vivekananda gave shape to. Naturally, for the monks and devotees of the Order, the birth centenary of the Great Master was the most momentous occasion in its thirty-nine year existence, and all preparations were made to observe it in a befitting manner.

The year-long celebration started on 24 February 1936, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna, and ended a week after his next birthday, on 21 March 1937. A General Committee had been formed for the celebration which included two direct disciples of the Master — Swami Akhandananda and Swami Abhedananada — as well as some prominent personalities of India and abroad of that day — such as Rabindranath Tagore, Romain Rolland, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Rajendra Prasad, S. Radhakrishnan, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Ba Yin, and Sylvian Levi. But the major reponsibility for executing the celebration was on Swami Shuddhananda, the secretary of the General Committee, and in this he was greatly assisted by Prof. Benoy Kumar Sarkar.

Though the celebration took place between February 1936 and March 1937, preparations for it began at least two years earlier. Swamis from various centres of the Order were sent to different places to make people aware of the importance of the occasion and of how great and valuable the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna was. Swami Bhaskareswarananda, President of the Nagpur centre, went for this purpose to Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, Swami Sharvananda was sent to Sind, and Swami Adyananda was deputed by the authorities to cover Gujarat and Kathiawad. A committee was formed in Bhuvaneswar with Swami Nirvanananda as secretary to celebrate the centenary in various parts of Orissa. Similar programmes were planned abroad also. In this way, all attempts were made to set the stage for the forthcoming celebration. Under the auspices of the Centenary Committee an all-India elocution competition was also held for all students from high school to the Master's degree level.

The year-long Centenary Celebration was inaugurated at Belur Math on 24 February 1936 and continued for a week. People from all over assembled at the Math premises on all the seven days, but the crowds on the first and last days especially were unprecedented. All the leading newspapers of Calcutta and other parts of India gave due coverage to the celebration.

Inaugural functions were also observed elsewhere in innumerable places in India and abroad. These programmes were organized not only by the Order,

but also by lay admirers of the Master. Special mention should be made of the celebration at Varanasi. On 24 February a temple to Sri Ramakrishna was opened there by Swami Vijnanananda, and from 1st to 5th March a Convention of Religions was held. Monks and religious leaders of all faiths and denominations took part in the programme. Three other Conventions of the same kind were held in New Delhi, Nagpur, and at the Ardha-kumbhamela (the fair or the gathering of monks and pilgrims that takes place every six years after a Purna-kumbhamela) at Allahabad. One remarkable feature observed in all these celebrations was that even orthodox monks of various Orders took part, and they unhesitatingly acknowledged Sri Ramakrishna as the prophet of the present age. In Calcutta too a large meeting was held at the Town Hall on 26 February 1936, which was presided over by the Maharaja of Santosh.

The celebrations continued throughout the year with festivals, meetings, processions, fairs, and exhibitions, as well as the publication of books and special issues of papers and periodicals. In India the celebration was held on a national scale, all possible towns and villages paying their tribute to the great Master. Even outside India devotees and admirers in many countries observed the Birth Centenary in their own ways. In almost all of these programmes the monks of the Ramakrishna Order either actively participated or they guided the organizers who executed the programmes.

As a befitting conclusion to the year-long Centenary Celebration, the General Committee organized an International Parliament of Religions at the Town Hall in Calcutta. This Parliament of Religions, which was the first of its kind in India, was inaugurated on 1 March 1937 and continued for eight days. Eminent personalities and religious leaders from all over India, as well as some distinguished people from abroad, such as Francis Younghusband, were invited. About seven foreign countries were represented. Of the fifteen sessions of the Parliament, six were presided over by scholars from Argentina, China, Czechoslovakia, England, Iran, and the United States of America. The Indian celebrities included Sri Brajendranath Seal, Rabindranath Tagore, Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, and Dr. A. B. Dhruva. The total number of papers read and lectures delivered in the fifteen sessions was one hundred and ten. The entire Proceedings of the Parliament were published soon after in two volumes entitled *The Religions of the World* (now available from the Institute of Culture in a one-volume edition).

Another remarkable achievement of the Centenary Celebration Committee was the publication of *The Cultural Heritage of India* in three volumes. This is an invaluable collection of essays from one hundred eminent Indian scholars on the past achievements of India in the fields of art, architecture, science, literature, philosophy, and religion. The work also contained an interpretative life of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Nirvedananda.

Apart from organizing the celebrations and the attempts at spreading the message of the Master, the Centenary Celebration General Committee also made some long-term plans which were to take concrete shape in the following years. The most important of them was the idea of an international institute for the exchange of cultural ideas.

The ashrama at Colombo shifted to its permanent home in the Master's Birth Centenary year. The new building was dedicated on the very date of Sri Ramakrishna's birth centenary — 24 February 1936. In the same year, on 26th April, the centre's Jerbei Memorial Hall was opened, and two years later the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Temple and Prayer Hall was dedicated.

Affiliations of Private Centres and Inaugurations of New Centres

If we look into the history of various branches of the Order, we find that most of them were started through the efforts of some monks or lay devotees, and they gradually grew as private centres, following the same ideals as that of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The Math and Mission observed their work and activities over a long period, and only after they were satisfied were the centres affiliated with the Order. One such ashrama owes its origin solely to the efforts of Swami Prabhananda (Ketaki Maharaj). In 1931 he single-handedly started the work in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The work continued for several years, and in 1936 the Mission took responsibility for it. Swami Prabhananda passed away in 1938, but even after his death the work went on successfully. As the activities soon spread over the whole district, the Mission divided it in 1947 into two separate centres — one at Shillong, with a temple, library, charitable dispensary, primary school, and preaching work; and the other at Cherrapunji, with a high school and hostel, and other branch institutions located in inaccessible villages nearby.

The centres at Taki, Jalpaiguri, Salem, Kalady, and Guwahati have more or less the same history. They all started as private institutions, working along the same lines as the Math and Mission centres, but outside the Order. In later years they were all absorbed by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission — Taki in 1938; Jalpaiguri, Salem, and Kalady in 1941; and Guwahati in 1968 (having started as a private ashrama in 1939). The centre at Silchar also began as a private ashrama and was affiliated with the Mission in 1938.

Along with the affiliation of these private centres, some new centres were also established under the central direction of the Ramakrishna Mission. They include the centres at Karachi (started in 1936) and Vishakhapatnam (started in 1938), as well as the Tuberculosis Sanatorium at Ranchi and the Institute of Culture in Calcutta.

Acquisition of Places Associated with Sri Ramakrishna

A remarkable achievement of this period (1936-1950) is the acquisition of some places associated with the life of Sri Ramakrishna. These include Kamarpukur, Kankurgachi, and Cossipore. The Ramakrishna Yogodyan at Kankurgachi was a retreat built by Ramchandra Datta, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna had visited the place, and after his passing away, his ashes were buried there. Later, in 1931, a temple was built on the spot. In 1943, the owners of the Kankurgachi retreat handed over the property to Belur Math so that the holy place associated with the Master would be properly preserved.

While the Kankurgachi Yogodyan was turned over to the Mission amicably and at no expense, things were not so easy with the Cossipore garden house and Kamarpukur. In the case of Cossipore, as it became impossible to purchase the land directly from its owners, the Mission approached the Government so that they might acquire the land on the Mission's behalf. But before the Government could take it over, another party purchased it and the Mission had to buy the property from them at a heavy price. First, in 1946, half of the property was purchased, including the historic house in which the Master had spent his last days. The other half of the property was secured in April 1949. At Cossipore the Master had breathed his last, bequeathed his message to Swami Vivekananda, and had taught him and the other disciples to carry out

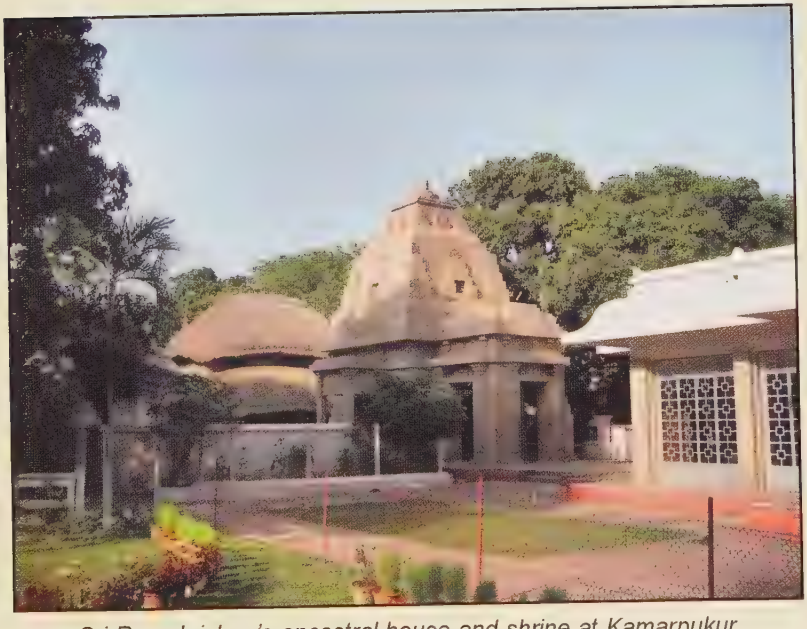
his mission. In Swamiji's opinion, Cossipore was really the first monastery of the Order. So the inclusion of this place in the Order was a landmark in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement.

The birthplace of the Master at Kamarpukur was acquired in March 1947. Even in 1917, Swami Saradananda had purchased a plot of land next to the ancestral home of the Master with a view to erecting a memorial structure there. Then, the following year, Holy Mother and the other co-sharers of the ancestral property turned over to the trustees of Belur Math the small patch of land where the Master was born. But it was impossible to build anything substantial on that, so negotiations went on with the family to get possession of the surrounding cottages and land. As nothing fruitful came out of this, the Government was approached to intervene. Realizing the national importance of the place, and convinced that a memorial would be preserved best in the hands of the Ramakrishna Mission, the Government acquired the property for the Mission in March 1947. The following month a combined Math and Mission centre was started there. The owners of the property received the market price and the usual compensations. However, as the deal concerned none but the Master's family, the authorities of Belur Math on their own paid the members of the family an additional sum and rebuilt the cottage of their family deity Raghuvir with brick and concrete.

Sri Ramakrishna Temple

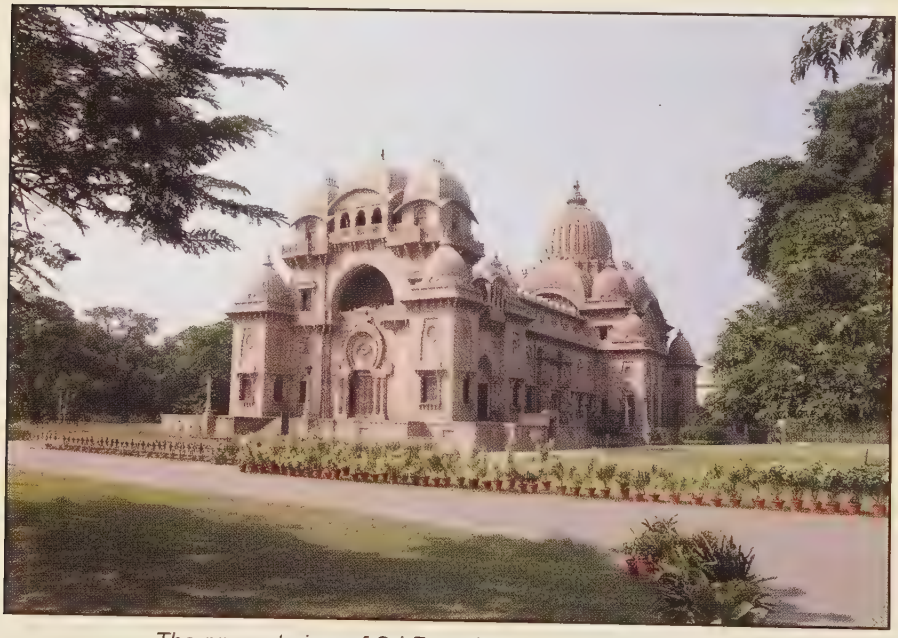
Another landmark in the history of the Order during this period was the opening of the Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math. The importance of a temple in people's religious life can never be overemphasized. A temple is a place where spiritually-inclined people gather to pray, meditate, and perform other spiritual practices. As this goes on for some time, the temple gradually acquires a tangible spiritual vibration which helps future visitors derive spiritual benefit from it more easily. For this reason, a temple to Sri Ramakrishna at the central place of the Order, which was established after his ideals, was very much a necessity. It was necessary to imprint on the hearts of the visitors not only what Sri Ramakrishna physically looked like, but also, along with it, the ideas which he stood for. It was Swami Vivekananda who had conceived of the idea of a temple to Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math. He also told his brother

Kankurgachi Yogodyan



Sri Ramakrishna's ancestral house and shrine at Kamarpukur

An early view of Sri Ramakrishna's temple under construction at Belur



The present view of Sri Ramakrishna's temple at Belur

disciple Swami Vijnanananda what the temple should look like and how it should harmonize the architectural styles of various Hindu temples as well as the styles of a church, a mosque, and a Buddhist cave temple.

It was not possible, however, to build the temple entirely after Swamiji's plan. The main obstacle was money. Keeping all the main features of Swamiji's plans intact, Swami Vijnanananda prepared a new design. The foundation-stone had been laid long back in 1929 by Swami Shivananda on the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. But the construction could not be started for the next six years due to lack of funds. At last a devotee from the USA, Miss Helen F. Rubel, who was known in the inner circle of the Order as Bhakti, offered to bear the major part of the expense.

As the spot where the foundation-stone had been laid by Mahapurush Maharaj was found to be unsuitable, the same stone was ceremoniously moved to another spot by Swami Vijnanananda on 16 July 1935, the auspicious Guru-Purnima day. The construction then went on in full swing, and by the end of 1937 the temple was almost complete except for the front section. As Swami Vijnanananda's health was failing, the authorities decided not to delay the dedication of the temple any more. The day chosen was 14 July 1938. The relics of the Master were enshrined in the new temple by Swami Vijnanananda, and with elaborate rites the temple was opened for all. On the altar was an image of the Master made after the photograph of him seated in samādhi. It had been carved in white Italian marble by the reputed sculptor of Calcutta, Mr. G. Paul. The designs on the white altar were done by the famous artist Mr. Nandalal Bose. Mr. Bose also drew the designs of the nine planetary deities in the arches over the passage surrounding the sanctuary. The front portion of the temple took a few more months to be completed. At its highest point the temple was $112^{1}/_{2}$ feet high, and the prayer hall was 152 feet long, 72 feet wide, and 48 feet high. The total length of the whole structure was 238 feet from north to south.

Swamiji had told Swami Vijnanananda that when the temple would be dedicated, he would see it from above. As Swami Vijnanananda dedicated the temple, he felt that, true to his word, Swamiji was blessing the occasion from the region where he was, and his other brother disciples, who had left him behind, were also present. The tenth General Report of the Mission described the temple thus:

In point of beauty and grandeur, as well as strength, it may be considered the most remarkable temple of its kind in Northern India. Swamiji had wanted the temple to represent some of the best architectural features of various regions of India as well as the characteristic architecture associated with the major religions of the world. In fact, the temple symbolizes in stone the spirit of harmony of Sri Ramakrishna.

Some Important Centres of the Mission

During the period 1936-50, some of the centres, that would eventually become very important, either were inaugurated or made significant strides. The Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, which is now the largest hospital of the Mission as well as the largest non-Government hospital in West Bengal, had been started in July 1932. But on 1 July 1939 it moved to its present location at 99, Sharat Chandra Bose Road, Calcutta. The work received so much admiration and public support within a short time that it was eventually possible to procure the land on which it was situated. It took, however, many more years for the institution to reach its present stature.

Another centre in the area of medical services is the Tuberculosis Sanatorium near Ranchi. The incidence of tuberculosis was alarmingly high in pre-independent India, and the beds in the existing hospitals were quite inadequate. So in March 1937 the Mission decided to start a hospital sanatorium as its humble attempt to help tuberculosis victims. To implement this decision, in July 1939 a 240-acre plot of land was purchased at Dungri, a place ten miles from the Ranchi Railway Station, and with the small donation that was received, construction of buildings was started. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the second World War, the work was suspended for some time, and the sanatorium, with 32 beds, could be opened only in 1951.

In the field of education this period was remarkable for the important educational institutions that were started then. The Sarada Vidyalaya of Madras was taken over by the Mission during this period. The history of this school is somewhat akin to that of the Sister Nivedita Girls' School in Calcutta. Sister Subbalakshmi and her aunt, Valambal Ammal, both child widows, started a small home for widows at Egmore in 1912 with only four inmates. Then in 1927, the Sister inaugurated the Sarada Vidyalaya in a rented house at Triplicane

with twelve widows. These girls were imparted intensive training to become primary school teachers and earn their living.

As the school grew, it shifted to larger rented buildings in different parts of the city, until in 1938 the Sister applied to the Mission for its affiliation. At that time there was also a small elementary school at Mambalam, in Madras, under the management of the Vidyabibhardhini Sabha, as well as a small girls' section in the Mission's boys' high school. All the schools under the Sarada Vidyalaya were eventually amalgamated and the Mission took charge of the Vidyalaya from 2 May 1938, keeping the name unchanged. The training school had at that time only three classes — higher elementary, senior and junior, and preparatory. The Model Elementary School on Mahalakshmi Street served as the practising section. To this was added the elementary school controlled by the Sabha. In 1940 the girls' section of the Mission's boys' high school was separated, and this also was brought under the Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Vidyalaya. Today this institution has two higher secondary schools for girls, a middle school, a primary school, a pre-basic school, and two hostels. Another new educational institution that has become very important, the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, was started in 1941. When it was inaugurated it had, among other things, a residential intermediate college. Before this the Mission's educational activities had been confined only upto the high-school level. With the Vidyamandira, the Mission entered into the area of college education. The college soon attracted the attention of students and educationists by its brilliant results, and it later became a degree college, maintaining the same respect in the educational field.

The orphanage at Rahara was also opened during this period. As a consequence of the man-made famine of 1943-44, many children were left orphaned. The Mission had earlier taken part in relief work for the famine-stricken victims. Now also they felt the need to stand by the orphans. With a gift of money and land at Rahara from Srimati Induprabha, the widow of the late proprietor of Basumati, Sri Satish Chandra Mukherjee, the Mission opened the orphanage in September 1944 under the name Rahara Mission Boys' Home. Initially the number of orphans was 37. Soon the Government began recommending the Home, and with its support, the Mission could raise the number of orphans to 158 by the end of 1945. The number could not be increased more at that time due to insufficient accomodation.

Another prominent addition in the field of education was the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College of Madras. It was started in 1946 and immediately made its mark. It is still one of the best colleges of Tamil Nadu and the biggest run by the Mission. Yet another new centre in this field was the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama Students' Home at 18 Jadulal Mullik Road, Calcutta. Only meritorious poor students were allowed to stay in this Students' Home. Along with their studies, the students helped the monks of the Home in looking after the uplift of the surrounding slums. This institution afterwards took permanent shape in the Mission's educational complex at Narendrapur. Among other things this vast institution now has a residential degree college, a residential high school, a residential Blind Boys' Academy, a senior basic school, and a Social Welfare Centre. Its Lokasiksha Parishad in particular does extensive welfare work in villages of South Bengal by way of making the villagers economically self-reliant.

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture is another important centre of the Order that was started during this period. The idea of such an institution was conceived by the General Committee during the observance of the Birth Centenary of the Master as a centre where people from all over the world would meet for cultural exchange. And they would do so without any sectarian or parochial bias of race, religion, or nationality. Along with this, the universal message of Vedanta and of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda would be preached. With the same end in view, books would be published and meetings and seminars would be held. Accordingly, the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture was formally inaugurated on 29 January 1938. The General Committee handed over its funds and books to the new-born institution, as it was the fulfilment of one of the projects of the Committee. Both *The Cultural Heritage of India* and *Religions of the World* were then taken over by the Institute for publication. Shortly afterwards it started publishing a monthly *Bulletin*, presenting the lectures and seminars held at the Institute's auditorium. Though initially it had no permanent home, it earned much appreciation from the public. In the following years the Institute made rapid progress, and its present imposing building in South Calcutta, vibrant with multifarious activities in the cultural field, bears ample testimony to its popularity.

Centres Abroad

The Movement's work also made progress abroad with the preaching of the Master's message and the establishment of new centres. In many cases, the monks of the Order visited places where there were devotees. They placed before them the ideals of the Movement, its great significance in the individual and the collective life, and inspired the devotees not only to mould their lives according to the ideals but also to take active part in carrying on the Movement in their regions. Later, in many of these places, permanent centres were formed through the initiative of the devotees.

In 1937 the work of the Movement began in Fiji when Swami Avinashananda went there at the invitation of the Indian settlers in Fiji. Swami Avinashananda stayed for eight months, and then in January 1939 Swami Rudrananda went there and began preaching in different places of Fiji, making Nadi the centre of his activities. Through the dedicated work of these two Swamis, the Ramakrishna Mission, Nadi, formally came into existence more than a decade later in 1952.

The Movement in the USA, which had already seen much expansion in the preceding decades, now made further progress. In 1938 new centres were established in Seattle and St. Louis. And in the same year Swami Ashokananda, who had taken charge of the San Francisco centre in 1932, added a beautiful retreat centre at Lake Tahoe. Swami Vishwananda, who took charge of the Chicago centre after Swami Gnaneswarananda and passed away in 1937, renamed the centre as the Vivekananda Vedanta Society. In August 1939, The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York, which had been functioning since 1933, moved to its permanent home in a residential section of the city at 17 East 94th Street.

For several years Swami Ashokananda had been preaching the message of Vedanta at Oakland as an extension of the San Francisco work. As a result, in October 1939 a permanent centre in the adjacent university town of Berkeley came into being and became a part of, along with the San Francisco centre, the Vedanta Society of Northern California. A centre had been started in Boston in 1909. But with the death of its founder, Swami Paramananda, in 1939, the Order lost it as well as the other centres founded by him, as his followers separated from the Order. But in April 1941 another centre was started at Boston under Swami Akhilananda, and the following year in March the centre's

permanent home on Deerfield Street was inaugurated. The Vedanta Society of Sacramento too had its inception during this period, in 1949, and it was affiliated to the Vedanta Society of Northern California three years later.

In London, though the Movement had been started by Swami Vivekananda himself in the closing years of the last century, there was a complete lull for the next thirty years. In 1934 the work resumed through the initiative of Swami Avyaktananda. The centre was affiliated in 1948, and the work got fresh impetus when Swami Ghanananda took charge in 1949. Soon after, the Swami secured a permanent home for the centre and started publishing a bi-monthly magazine, *Vedanta for East and West*.

From the winter of 1935 to the end of 1938, Swami Yatiswarananda made extensive tour of various parts of Germany, Switzerland, and France, preaching the eternal message of Vedanta and its modern relevance as shown in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. His devoted services soon bore fruit when a centre was started in 1937 in Paris by Swami Siddheswarananda. Though the centre was flourishing, the Swami had to leave Paris and move to Montpellier in southern France when the second World War broke out. He could come back to Paris only after the close of the war. With the money donated by a lady devotee, some property was purchased in Gretz in March 1948, about 29 kilometres from Paris. After a little renovation, the centre moved there in June of that year.

As in France, in Germany too an official centre was started in 1933 at Wiesbaden with Swami Yatiswarananda as its head. However, he had to leave the country in 1938 due to the World War. The Vedanta Movement there was nevertheless kept alive during the following decades by various groups of admirers at different places. The large country of Germany had to wait until December 2004 when a new centre was founded at Bindweide. The story of Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement in Germany has been narrated in one of the following articles of this volume. Anyhow, another centre in Asia was opened in 1939 at Port Louis, Mauritius.

Preaching and Publication Work

Along with the establishment of new centres, the Order continued its preaching work and the publication of books and journals. In each centre the

birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda were observed. These celebrations invariably included, among other things, lectures on these great personalities. Besides this, the monks of the Order were continually engaged in the preaching of the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and the philosophy of Vedanta, either at the premises of their respective centres or outside, whenever there arose an occasion.

The journals *Prabuddha Bharata* and *The Vedanta Kesari* in English, *Udbodhan* in Bengali, and *Prabuddha Keralam* in Malayalam continued being published without any break. Books in English, Bengali, and other vernacular languages were also published. Mention has already been made of *The Cultural Heritage of India* and *Religions of the World*. Also, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (in English as well as in the original Bengali) sold in thousands during this period. This indicates the growth of the Movement.

Relief Work

The remarkable characteristic which distinguishes the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission from the traditional Vedantic monks is their concern for human beings. A human being is but another image of God, just as the countless deities are but various forms of the same God. The service of God in human beings is also the best way of purifying the heart, without which God is not revealed to us. Therefore, since its inception the Mission has stood by human beings whenever a famine or a natural calamity has struck. Some of the important relief activities conducted by the Mission during the period 1936-50 are as follows:

- Cholera Relief: at Almora in 1938, at Murshidabad in 1941, and at Champaran in 1944.
- Cyclone Relief: at Guntur in 1936, at Ganjam and Puri in 1938, at Balasore, Midnapore, and 24 Parganas in 1942-44.
- Destitute Relief: at Calcutta in 1943-44.
- Assam Evacuee Relief: at Silchar in 1942-44.
- Burma Evacuee Relief: at Chittagong, Dimapur, and Noakhali in 1942-44.

• Bengal Refugee Relief:	in West Bengal in 1948-49, and in Assam, Bihar, East Bengal, Tripura, and West Bengal in 1950-51.
• East Punjab Refugee Relief:	at Kurukshetra in 1947.
• Flood Relief:	every year from 1936-42, and again in 1946, 1947, and 1950. Places affected were: Arakan (Burma), Kanpur, Malda, Puri, Cuttuck, Dhaka, Faridpur, Midnapore, Birbhum, Kathiawar, Sind, Surat, Sylhet, Cachar, Chittagong, and Saurashtra.

Special mention should be made of the Distress Relief in 1943-45 and the Riot Relief in 1946-49. During the second World War, the British Government was apprehensive of Japan invading India, so they decided to inflict a 'scorched earth policy' on them in case they advanced up to Assam and Bengal. To deprive the Japanese of food and other necessities, the Government disrupted all communication and removed all food commodities from the market. As a result, a devastating artificial food shortage was created, and people died in millions. Still the Government did not declare it a famine, only to avoid the responsibility for it. They instead called it a 'distress'. The Mission too had to use the term 'Distress Relief', but they plunged head-on into the work. It was probably the most challenging relief work the Mission had ever undertaken. It was a 'struggle against death itself'. The Mission started its relief work in June 1943, and it continued till April 1945. The total expenditure in cash amounted to Rs. 11,66,500. Along with this, goods worth Rs. 25,00,000 were distributed. The relief was conducted from 75 cities spread over 19 districts and covering 1,169 villages and 22 towns.

The Mission also rendered another valuable service in connection with this man-made famine. Convinced of the Mission's dedicated service and genuine love for the suffering humanity, the Government entrusted the Mission with the administration of the Destitute Centre and Orphanage on Nalin Sarkar Street in North Calcutta. There, 21000 men and women were sheltered, looked after, and later repatriated. In addition, over 1200 orphans were picked up, mostly from the streets of Calcutta, and provided with food and shelter. It may be mentioned here that the orphanage at Rahara came into being as a result of this man-made famine.

Next came the holocaust of the Hindu-Muslim riots. The dying imperialist rulers injected their last venom into the nation's body as they realized for certain that they had to leave India. Using their much tested 'divide and rule policy', they very shrewdly set the Hindus and Muslims against each other. In 1946, riots broke out in East Bengal with looting, arson, mass conversion, murder, and other atrocities. Hindu houses were burned to the ground. The worst victims were in the district of Noakhali. Normalcy was restored only after the military had intervened, but by then a whole community had been uprooted. The survivors required, of course, economic support, but more than that, they needed love, sympathy, and reassurance. The Mission stepped forward in the relief work in its humble way. Houses were rebuilt and food and agricultural equipment were provided. Besides this, the monks went from door to door instilling courage in the hearts of the victims. Two students' homes were started locally to accommodate and educate 25 orphans, and 55 other orphans were absorbed by existing institutions of the Mission elsewhere.

Administrative Consolidation

As already stated in the preceding essay, two very unfortunate incidents had taken place during the period 1923-35. One concerned Brahmachāri Ganendranath in Bengal, and the other, Swami Nirmalananda, who had founded some of the centres in South India, including the one at Bangalore. They claimed to own the centres and the property which they had so far been looking after on behalf of the Mission. In both cases the Mission had to go to court to settle the dispute. Details of these incidents can be found in *The History of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission* by Swami Gambhirananda. It had been Swami Vivekananda's wish that lofty ideals should combine with immense practicality. But from those two incidents the authorities understood very well that the rules of the Math and Mission should be well guarded and made as flawless as possible so that nobody could take undue advantage of the monks' goodness and exploit the Order. In view of those past incidents, it was felt necessary to make the various centres of the Order more integrated and form a composite whole, without, however, regimenting the individual initiatives of the branch centres. Allegiance to the Headquarters and freedom of work would be harmoniously blended in the functioning of the various centres.

In order to make it effective, a special Monks' Conference was called in April 1935, which was the first Monks' Conference of the Order. The purpose of the Conference was nicely described by the then General Secretary of the Order, Swami Virajananda, in these words:

> If the ideal of *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca* is to be actualised, we shall have to preserve intact an atmosphere of love, friendship and cooperation among ourselves. There should be amity between the main centre and its branches, as also among the Heads of centres and their workers, and all of us will have to sacrifice every parochial idea...to strive with all our might to encompass the good of the entire organisation. It has appeared to us that some rules have got to be framed that are needed at the present juncture for the spiritual uplift of the monks in all our centres through a harmonious blending of work, study and spiritual effort.

The draft of the new rules and regulations had been circulated earlier among the Heads of the centres and the senior monks. Then at the Monks' Conference, these rules and regulations were placed before all for general discussion, and after the additions and amendments resulting from the Conference were made, they were sanctioned by the trustees as *The Rules and Regulations of the Ramakrishna Order 1935*. The rules were divided into five sections: 1) Headquarters, 2) Discipline, 3) Admission, 4) Code of Conduct, and 5) Training.

But while implementing these rules, it was soon found that some of them were too idealistic and not practically feasible, so further amendments were felt necessary. This was done at the Monks' Conference of 1937, and the Trustees passed the revised rules as *The Rules and Regulations of the Ramakrishna Math 1937*.

Now, what was the position of the 1937 Rules of the Order with reference to Swamiji's rules, the Trust Deed, and the 1935 rules? Swamiji's rules 'remained still supreme in all matters of faith and belief, and as a pointer to the attitude with which our problems were to be approached, studied and solved.' The Trust Deed remained 'supreme in all matters of administration and spiritual life.' Next came the 1937 rules in order of importance, and the 1935 rules remained to supplement the unspecified points of the 1937 rules. Since then, for all practical purposes, the 1937 rules regulate almost wholly the constitutional or business side of the Order.

The great significance of the 1937 amendments is that the possibilities of the kind of disruption that had happened earlier were completely guarded against. The Order now stood on a solid rock of goodwill and constitutional cohesion.

A Resume of the Mission's Growth

As we have mentioned earlier, the Ramakrishna Mission had 50 Mission centres and 59 Math centres in 1936. A decade later, the number of Mission centres had increased to 69 and Math centres to 67. So the growth in terms of number was splendid — adding almost three centres every year. Along with this, the previously existing centres also grew and functioned more fruitfully. Every year the medical centres treated more patients and the educational centres admitted more students than before. The same thing happened in other areas of activities also. Many of the centres discovered new avenues of service, responding to local needs. For instance, an institution may have been opened for high school education, but later it would also give primary level education and run a night school to meet the people's needs.

The Mission's report shows that apart from the formal high school and college level education offered by the Mission's two colleges and 29 schools, it also conducted, by the year 1947, 4 industrial schools, 8 vocational and agricultural training sections, 16 middle schools, 61 upper and lower primary schools, and 16 night schools. In 1947 itself, the Mission offered medical treatment to about 15 lakhs of patients through 9 indoor hospitals and 60 outdoor dispensaries.

Vivekananda's greatest concern was for the wretched condition of India's masses and women. The Mission did its utmost in these fields also. By 1948, the Mission had established quite a number of educational institutions solely for girls and women teachers. In these institutions, vocational subjects were also introduced to help women stand on their own feet. In the field of medical service, there were some maternity centres for expectant mothers and women's sections in indoor hospitals run exclusively by women.

Concerning the needs of the masses, many institutions were started in rural areas, some of which were dedicated only for villagers. Night schools were established and educational tours were conducted using magic lanterns

and gramophones. For the hill tribes, permanent institutions were established in the Khasi and Jaintia hills. The General Report of the Mission shows that during the period 1947-48 alone, the Mission conducted 150 activities of various types in the service of labourers and backward people.

Regarding relief work, the Mission had always stood by the suffering whenever the situation demanded it. With its limited resources, it did its utmost to mitigate the sufferings of people. And this it did, not out of a sense of pity, but in a spirit of worship, looking upon the distressed as the living God.

So the growth of the Mission during the period under discussion was all round. Services were offered at all levels — physical, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual. And while rendering these services, ideals were not lost sight of. They were put into practice as far as possible. At the same time the organizational bond was strengthened. These were the glorious features of the Movement during this period.

The Fourth Phase of Ramakrishna Movement

EXPANSION AFTER INDEPENDENCE

AMITABHA MUKHERJEE

From 1947 to 1965

The advent of independence on the 15th of August 1947 opened up to the Indian people the possibility of tremendous growth and all-round development. By this time the Ramakrishna Mission, which had completed fifty years of its existence, was a well-disciplined, active, and an expanding organization, catering both to the spiritual and material needs of the Indian people, enjoying to a large degree their confidence, love, and respect. The tragic conditions under which India had attained her political liberation greatly increased the responsibilities of the Mission with regard to the alleviation of distress of the people, to whose service it stood committed according to the ideals of its founder. The demand for food, shelter, education, and health care services was rapidly increasing. The people believed that independence would lead to the amelioration of their economic conditions very soon, without realizing how difficult this task had been rendered by nearly two hundred years of imperialist rule. Partition of the country and the influx of hundreds of thousands of homeless refugees, uprooted from their ancestral abodes in Pakistan, complicated the problem still further. The Ramakrishna Mission was therefore called upon to extend immediately its fields of activity and devote its energies to a much greater extent than before to the service of distress-stricken

humanity in this country. The Government of free India was also eager to enlist its support in different short and long-term programmes, and to extend to it all possible assistance for implementing them. But the Mission, like any other organic body, could not suddenly outgrow itself, and there was bound to remain a gulf between what was expected and what could actually be achieved.

The resources and range of activities of the Ramakrishna Mission at the beginning of our period were not very extensive when compared with those of some other organizations. According to the Annual Report for 1946-47, there were 65 centres of the Ramakrishna Mission and 67 of the Ramakrishna Math all over India. So far as health care service was concerned, the Mission in 1947 ran 9 big hospitals and 60 out-patient dispensaries besides small units dispensing homoeopathic medicine attached to almost all Math and Mission centres. The Mission's activities in the educational field were much wider. It had set up by this time 2 colleges, 26 ordinary secondary schools, 3 residential schools, 4 industrial schools, 8 vocational and agricultural sections attached to other schools, 16 middle schools, 61 upper and lower primary schools, and 16 night schools. Several thousand boys and girls were educated in these institutions according to the cherished ideals of the Ramakrishna Mission. Besides, there were training schools and colleges for nurses and teachers, orphanages, students' homes, and some Sanskrit schools. True to Swamiji's ideals, the Mission tried to establish contact with the people by setting up institutions in rural areas which catered only to the needs of the villagers. Monks would sometimes go on educational tours in rural areas with magic lanterns and gramophones. Some permanent institutions were also set up for the hill tribes of northeastern India, particularly those in the Khasi and Jaintia hills.

In the post-Independence period the financial resources of the Ramakrishna Mission undoubtedly increased to a great extent because of large amounts of recurring and non-recurring grants from the Government, both at the Centre and in the different States. Private donations declined comparatively because of the nationalization of land and some of the key industries, and the higher rate of taxation imposed on the affluent. But this was again offset to some extent by the Government's policy of exempting donations to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission from payment of income tax. The firm decision taken by the Math and Mission authorities in 1952 not to identify themselves with any political party or group, and not to take part in elections — municipal,

provincial, or national — also made evident the non-political character of the Mission and enabled it to enjoy the confidence and support of all sections of the nation.

The period from August 1947 to October 1965 may be taken as the first phase of the Mission's growth in the post-Independence period. Swami Virajananda, who had received his spiritual training from Sarada Devi and had also personally served Swami Vivekananda, was the President of the Ramakrishna Order. He held that office till his demise in May 1951. He was succeeded, one after another, by Swami Shankarananda (1951-1962), Swami Vishuddhananda (March-June 1962), and Swami Madhavananda (August 1962-October 1965), all of whom had received their spiritual guidance from the Holy Mother or from Swami Brahmananda. In their early lives, they as well as many other senior monks of this period, had been closely associated with the Holy Mother and one or the other of Vivekananda's brother disciples, and retained throughout their lives the inspiration they had thus received.

The first serious problem which the Mission faced during this period was that of the migration of refugees from East Pakistan, which started immediately after partition, but assumed very serious proportions only in 1950 in consequence of communal riots, economic pressure, and the social humiliation suffered by the minority community in that country. The Ramakrishna Mission, along with many other voluntary organizations, mobilized its resources first to provide food and temporary shelter to the refugees, and then to attempt their long-term rehabilitation within India. Thousands of refugees were fed daily at the Sealdah railway terminus in Calcutta where they were arriving by train from different parts of East Pakistan. Eventually the Mission opened 19 centres for refugee relief at different places in West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, and Tripura with financial assistance received from the Central and State Governments as well as from the generous public. The Mission's plan for rehabilitating these refugees in places far away from West Bengal could not, however, be implemented for political reasons, and ultimately the Mission settled the refugees in their charge in selected areas of West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam bordering on East Pakistan. Nearly 2900 families were provided with land and houses by 1950-51.

Numerous other relief operations were undertaken by the Mission in different parts of India — from Assam in the east to Maharashtra and Kutch in

the west, and from Uttar Pradesh in the north to Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the south — during the period under review. Most of these were in response to natural calamities like famine, flood, cyclone, and earthquake, which were almost annual events in our country, while some were organized to relieve human distress caused by man-made calamities like communal riots and persecution of linguistic and other minorities. The wide areas covered by these relief operations and the diverse communities benefited by them clearly revealed the non-sectarian, national character of the Ramakrishna Mission, and earned for it universal appreciation and public and Government support. Indeed, the Mission's relief operation sometimes extended beyond the territorial limits of India to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The Mission not only provided temporary relief to the distressed by distributing food, clothes, and medicine but, in a number of cases, also provided for their permanent rehabilitation by building new colonies or villages, repairing damaged houses, and setting up new educational institutions, both general and technical. Regular accounts were kept of all the money spent on relief and rehabilitation work, and these were duly audited and made available for public scrutiny, so that the charge of financial irregularity could not be levied against the Mission.

The Ramakrishna Mission also considerably expanded its health care activities during these years. The Mission's existing hospitals at Varanasi, Vrindavan, and Kankhal increased their number of patients by putting up new buildings, with facilities for treatment on modern lines. A tuberculosis sanatorium was set up at Dungri near Ranchi in 1951, and an after-care colony with a rehabilitation centre was added to it at the time of its expansion in 1965. Matribhavan, an institution for antenatal and natal cases, was opened in South Calcutta in 1950, while a similar institution, the Shishumangal Pratishthan, which already existed in the city, was upgraded to a general hospital called Seva Pratishthan in 1957. The latter institution developed rapidly and, by 1965, came to have 350 beds (some of which were reserved for poor patients), various out-patient departments, a training school for nurses, and a unit of the Calcutta University College of Medicine for post-graduate studies. The medical units attached to the Ramakrishna Math centres at Mayavati, Nagpur, Rajkot, Madras, Thrissur, Kalady, and Trivandrum were also considerably developed. Two important features of the Mission hospitals and medical dispensaries went to make them very popular. First, they paid equal attention to patients of

different castes and creeds and people belonging to different strata of the society. Secondly, the monks personally supervised the arrangements for medical treatment and nursing, and in some cases served as nurses, compounders, and dressers, looking upon their work as service to God, as Swami Vivekananda had taught. Almost everywhere they were able to enlist the services of some top-ranking local medical practitioners and to attract generous donations from the affluent and others.

New educational institutions built by the Ramakrishna Mission during these years were located mostly in West Bengal, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The residential intermediate college attached to the Saradapitha at Belur was converted in 1960 into a degree college, called Vidyamandira. Other institutions under the Saradapitha such as Sikshanamandira (College of Education), Shilpamandir (Polytechnic), Shilpavidyalaya (Industrial School), and Janasikshamandira (Institute for juvenile and adult education) were either started or registered rapid growth during this period. A vast educational complex of the Ramakrishna Mission was built up at Narendrapur, 16 kilometres southeast of Calcutta, comprising a residential high school, a similar degree college, a residential Blind Boys' Academy, a senior basic school, a social welfare centre, and an Institute of Social Education. The Blind Boys' Academy imparted not only general education but also vocational training in music, agriculture, small industries, and various crafts to help the students earn their bread on completing their education. The Narendrapur institutions also undertook rural development work by imparting adult education, setting up mobile libraries and audio-visual units, providing medical care, and such other activities. The Calcutta Students' Home of the Mission was shifted to Belgharia in the neighbourhood of Calcutta in 1954. A polytechnic was started here in 1958, and an assembly-cum-library was added in 1964. The Purulia Vidyapith, which had been working as a branch of the Vidyapith at Deoghar (Bihar), was set up as an independent centre with a residential multipurpose higher secondary school in 1963. Like the Narendrapur institutions, the Purulia Vidyapith soon developed into an ideal educational institution, attracting students from far and near. The Ashrama at Ramharipur, Bankura, located in rural surroundings, also had under its management a multipurpose higher secondary school, and it was made a full-fledged Mission centre in 1966. All these educational institutions not only imparted a high standard of education, but also laid great emphasis on character-

building through extra-curricular, corporate activities and by cultivating a sense of discipline and duty towards the motherland.

Respect for Indian culture and the spiritual ideals of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement was sought to be fostered at the same time through regular lectures, religious classes, and seasonal functions. On 13 May 1956 (Akshaya Tritiyā), a training centre for brahmachārins (probationers) was inaugurated at the Belur Math. Math libraries and reading rooms multiplied, and the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, established in 1938, was shifted in 1960 to a large, magnificent building at Gol Park in South Calcutta which housed a big library with a children's section, an International Guest House, a spacious auditorium (Vivekananda Hall), a School of Languages and a publication department regularly publishing books on religion and culture besides the monthly *Bulletin* of the Institute. The Institute of Culture developed rapidly in subsequent years and did much to promote cultural cooperation between India and other countries. The Calcutta branch of the Mayavati Advaita Ashrama also moved in 1961 to a new spacious building which accommodated a library and reading room, an auditorium, and its reputed publication department.

To keep the spiritual ardour of the monks and the lay devotees of the Ramakrishna Order unflagging, new temples and prayer halls were built at many Math centres, of which those in New Delhi, Allahabad, Ranchi, Bombay, and Bangalore deserve special mention. A stone temple, designed by the famous artist Nandalal Bose, was consecrated at Kamarpukur on the very birthplace of the Master in March 1951; and surrounding this temple there grew up in course of time a monastery, a charitable dispensary, and different types of schools. A white marble image of Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, was installed in her renovated temple at Jayrambati in April 1954, as a part of her birth centenary celebration. The house at Cossipore where the Master entered into mahāsamādhi was rebuilt on its original plan in 1954-55.

The period from 1947 to 1965 was remarkable in the history of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission for two very important events — the birth centenary celebration of the Holy Mother in 1953-54, and that of Swami Vivekananda ten years later (1963-64). Throughout her life the Mother had kept herself outside the public gaze, and her tremendous spiritual power and profound love and sympathy for all were known only to those who

came in close contact with her. But in 1953, the year of her birth centenary, the Ramakrishna Mission decided to give wide publicity to the personality of the Mother, the ideas and ideals for which she stood, and also the new dignity that she had conferred upon womanhood. Accordingly her birth centenary was marked by a series of meetings, conferences, exhibitions, processions, and publications throughout the country. The inaugural ceremony took place at Belur Math on 27 December 1953, under the chairmanship of Swami Shankarananda, President of the Math and Mission. Of the numerous meetings and conferences mention should be made of the convention of the women devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother in Calcutta (April 1954), the All India Women's Music Conference at the Calcutta University Institute Hall (December 1954), and the Women's Cultural Conference at the same place (December 1954). Two huge pilgrims' processions were taken out, one from Dakshineswar to Belur Math in January 1954, and the other from the Cossipore garden house to Belur Math towards the end of that year. An attractive and scholarly work, *Great Women of India*, written by eminent scholars, was brought out on this occasion, and so were a comprehensive life of Sarada Devi in Bengali and some smaller books on her life and teachings in different languages. An exhibition of 'Arts, Crafts and Culture' was also organized in Calcutta in her sacred memory (December 1954-January 1955).

But the most significant development which took place in consequence of the centenary celebration was the founding of the Sarada Math near Dakshineswar in December 1954. Even before this, in December 1953, on the birthday of Holy Mother, some dedicated women workers had been given the vows of brahmacharya by the President of Ramakrishna Math. Subsequently, in 1959, eight of them were given sannyāsa ordination at Belur Math. Sarada Math had, however, a completely independent body of trustees who later formed the governing body of the newly set up Ramakrishna Sarada Mission (May 1960). All Ramakrishna Sarada Mission institutions run for women, like the Nivedita School and Matribhavan in Calcutta (and later on some girls' schools in Kerala), were handed over to Sarada Math. This was done in fulfilment of Swami Vivekananda's noble desire to have women's affairs guided completely by women themselves without any interference by men. Sarada Math later established centres in New Delhi, Varanasi, Madras, and other places. A detailed

account of the genesis and growth of the Sarada Math is given in the article, 'A New Monastic Tradition for Women', at the end of this part.

The birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated on a world-wide scale from January 1963 to January 1964. The celebration was inaugurated on 17 January 1964 at Belur Math by Swami Madhavananda, the President of the Order, whose inaugural address was broadcast by the Calcutta station of All India Radio. This was followed by two huge public meetings at Deshapriya Park in Calcutta, the first of which was inaugurated by Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the President of the Indian Republic. Messages from national leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and Chakravarty Rajagopalachari were read out before the huge audience, about 1,00,000 strong. Lectures, processions, exhibitions, cultural functions, elocution competitions, etc. were organized all over India by numerous schools, colleges, universities, libraries, clubs, and associations either under the guidance of the Central Centenary Celebration Committee or independently on their own. Among the functions organized by the Central Committee, mention may be made of the All India Monks' Conference at Varanasi (November 1963), the All India Students' Convention, the All India Women's Conference, the All India Music Conference, and last but not the least, the eight-day long Parliament of Religions in Calcutta (December 1963) attended by delegates from different countries of Asia, Europe, and America besides eminent scholars from different streams of learning of this country. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in 8 volumes was translated into many Indian languages at the initiative of the Centenary Committee. Many other books and souvenirs depicting Swamiji's life and message were brought out from different Math centres and by various other institutions in different languages. In fact, the centenary celebration gave a great stimulus to study and research on Swamiji's life and teachings in India and abroad. Outside India, Vivekananda centenary celebrations were held in the USSR, Japan, and the United States. In a dinner-meeting held in New York, U Thant, the Secretary General of the United Nations, described Vivekananda as 'one of the greatest men of all time' and 'the greatest spiritual ambassador of India'.

Side by side with these two centenary celebrations, which gave a great stimulus to the growth and diversification of the activities of the Mission, we have to note an unhappy incident which adversely affected it, namely the

secession of the educational complex at Tirupparaitturai in Tamil Nadu from the Ramakrishna Mission in 1962. Its head, Swami Chidbhavananda, also dissociated himself from the Ramakrishna Order because of some misunderstanding. The partition of India in August 1947, and the communal carnage which followed, had resulted in the break up of the Lahore centre of the Mission, but this was compensated for by the opening of a new centre in Chandigarh in 1954. In the same year the Mission started another new centre at Srinagar in the Kashmir valley, but for various reasons it had to be closed down within two years.

The Mission's activities outside India also deserve special mention. In the Western world the monks of the Order devoted themselves mainly to the task of propagating the spiritual message of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda through lectures, seminars, intimate personal discussions, and publications. Without trying to convert anyone to Hinduism, they sought to help individuals progress in their own chosen spiritual paths. They insisted not only upon the necessity of prayer and meditation but also upon improvement in one's character. They emphasized personal experience or realization as the only acceptable proof of religion, encouraged inter-religious dialogue to bring out the similarity of outlook of different religions on fundamentals, and proclaimed selfless service to be a means of spiritual growth and development. These ideas contributed to the growing popularity of the Mission in the West. Dr. Carl Thomas Jackson observed in 1964 that the 'Ramakrishna Movement has been a rather unusual Movement with a significance out of proportion to its size.' He further conceded that in spite of the existence of so many religious groups or agencies of Indian origin in the United States, the 'Ramakrishna Movement has been and is the generally accepted representative of Hinduism' in that country. During the 1950s and 60s, the Mission was able to attract an increasing number of intellectuals, scientists, and artists, and some of its publications like Vivekananda's *Four Yogas* and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Swami Nikhilananda's English translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita*) enjoyed a wide circulation in the States. The important centres of the Mission in that country were located in New York, Boston, Chicago, Portland, St. Louis, Seattle, San Francisco and Hollywood. A beautiful Vedanta temple was constructed at Santa Barbara in 1956, and another at San Francisco in 1959. Swami Prabhavananda initiated some Americans into brahmacharya as early as 1947, and some of

them later took the vow of sannyāsa. Consequently, new monasteries and convents (for women) had to be set up at different places. Swamis Nikhilananda and Prabhavananda wrote a number of scholarly works on Hindu religious scriptures and Vedantic thought which created a deep impression on some Americans. In Europe the Ramakrishna Mission had its centres in London, Gretz (near Paris), and Geneva; and Swami Ghanananda of the London centre started a bi-monthly magazine, *Vedanta for East and West* in 1951. On the continent of Africa, Swami Nihshreyasananda carried on his work of spiritual ministration from 1954 onward in Zambia, Rhodesia, Nigeria, and other African countries.

Outside the Western world, the Mission sent its workers to those countries which had a sufficient concentration of Indian population such as the islands of Fiji and Mauritius, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Burma (Myanmar), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Singapore. In these countries the monks undertook social service activities such as establishing schools, libraries, students' homes, orphanages, hospitals, and dispensaries besides conducting cultural programmes and propagating spiritual ideals. In East Pakistan, however, their work had to be largely curtailed on account of communal riots. In Burma the Mission hospital at Rangoon was taken over by the Government in 1965 after the Burmese army was installed in power, and the centre there was eventually closed.

From 1965 to 1982

The second phase of the post-Independence history of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission extends from 1965 to 1982. After the demise of Swami Madhavananda, the President of the order, in 1965, and of Swami Yatiswarananda, the Vice-President, three months later, the spiritual leadership of the Order devolved upon Swami Vireswarananda who had received his spiritual initiation from Sri Sarada Devi (1916). He remained as President till his passing away in 1985. Though the Mission had to work against heavy odds, it maintained steady progress during this period, consolidating its existing institutions and also adding new ones in response to pressing public demand. Four new centres of the Mission were opened at Raipur (then Madhya Pradesh, now Chhattisgarh), Guwahati (Assam), Along and Narottam Nagar (Arunachal

Pradesh). A big Math centre was opened at Hyderabad, and two retreat centres for monks at Uttarkashi and Rishikesh (Uttaranchal). Kankhal and Lucknow came to have new Math centres in 1981 and 1982. The properties bequeathed by a devotee, Shamsher Singh, at Dehradun and Kishanpur (Uttaranchal), came into full possession of the Mission after prolonged litigation, and so did the entire dwelling house of Balaram Bose, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, in North Calcutta (now known as Balaram Mandir) in the year 1973. On the other hand, the Math centre founded in 1944 at Kalimpong in the Darjiling district had to be closed down in 1976.

Relief work of the Mission assumed much larger proportions during this period. In this connection mention may be made of drought relief work in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and parts of West Bengal in 1966-67, earthquake relief in Satara and Koyna Nagar in Maharashtra, flood relief in Surat and Bhavanagar in Gujarat, relief and rehabilitation work for refugees from Bangladesh (1971-72), cyclone relief in the coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (1977), flood relief in Bihar and West Bengal (1978), riot relief in Bihar, disturbance relief in Assam and Tripura, Dandakaranya deserters' relief in West Bengal, and fire relief in Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh (1979-81). Lakhs of rupees were spent on these relief operations which involved in some cases construction of new houses, schools, and community halls, and restoration of electricity and water supply systems. Outside India the Mission conducted earthquake relief in Nepal and cyclone relief in Sri Lanka, besides prolonged rehabilitation work in the newly created state of Bangladesh from 1972 onward.

For extending educational facilities, new buildings were erected for schools, colleges, and libraries at different centres. For the Baghbazar Math in North Calcutta (better known as 'Holy Mother's house'), a new multi-storeyed building was constructed to accommodate its growing publication department comprising the editorial office of the *Udbodhan*, a library, and auditorium. This helped the Math and Mission to meet more satisfactorily the growing popular demand for Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, and also to arrange regular lectures, religious discourses and seminars for propagating the ideals of the Movement. New buildings were also constructed at Mysore for the Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education which imparted cultural and spiritual training to post-graduate students.

Hospitals and dispensaries at different places belonging to the Ramakrishna Mission also got additional buildings for improving their health-care services. Thus Seva Pratishthan in South Calcutta got a new seven-storeyed block, while the Sevashrama of Lucknow constructed the magnificent building of the Vivekananda Polyclinic, which houses many out-patient departments and also a hospital (1970). The hospitals at Kankhal, Varanasi, and Trivandrum also acquired additional accommodations and better facilities for treatment of diseases.

Rural work in general and tribal welfare work in particular received a great deal of attention from the monks of the Order. In 1980 a separate department for integrated rural development under the designation of Pallimangal was set up under the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Its main purpose was to utilize all available resources for implementing programmes of rural uplift and development, involving eradication of illiteracy, dissemination of knowledge about public health and hygiene, providing medical assistance to the poor and the needy, making arrangements for training in handicrafts, giving interest-free loans for various economic projects that would generate gainful employment for the rural people, and promotion of women's and children's activities in the villages. The rural people, irrespective of their language, religion, or caste, were thus provided with opportunities for self-development and encouraged to work for their own uplift without depending upon public charity. The assistance of voluntary lay workers and associations was also enlisted for this purpose. The Government encouraged public donations to these projects by making them free from income-tax payment. Work begun initially in a number of villages near Jayrambati in the Bankura district and at Kamarpukur and Bali-Dewanganj in Arambagh, Hooghly district, soon spread to nearby areas as well.

So far as the welfare of the tribal people is concerned, a few positive steps were taken during this period. In 1969 the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Morabadi, Ranchi, in Bihar (now Jharkhand) initiated a training scheme in agriculture, dairy, and poultry under the title of 'Divyayan' mainly for the *ādivasis*, the aboriginal people of this region. To this was added in 1977 'Krishi Vijnan Kendra', a centre for agricultural experiments. The two new Mission centres at Along and Narottam Nagar in Arunachal Pradesh sought to provide educational facilities for tribal children in this region, while the existing centres

at Cherrapunji (Meghalaya), Silchar (Assam), Puri (Orissa), and Raipur (Chhattisgarh) carried on their work among the tribal people in their respective localities with renewed vigour. The number of primary and lower secondary schools under the Cherrapunji Ashrama rose to 47 by 1982. The Mission centre at Narendrapur in West Bengal and the Math centre at Kalady in South India also paid a good deal of attention to tribal welfare work. The principal object of the tribal welfare work of the Ramakrishna Mission was to promote the educational and economic advancement of the tribal people without destroying their tribal identity, but at the same time keeping them in close touch with the mainstream of Indian life.

The religious fervour of the monks and their lay followers found expression through the construction of beautiful temples, prayer halls and the installation of new images in some of the existing shrines in different parts of the country. Thus new temples were built at Guwahati (1971), Purulia (1974), Raipur (1976), Kankhal (1972), Vrindavan (1973), and Rajkot (1979) in North India, and at Thrissur (1966), Salem (1968), Kanchipuram (1969), and Kalady (1976) in the South. Outside India a new temple was erected at Mauritius in 1977. A marble image of Sri Ramakrishna was installed in the existing shrine of Yogodyan at Kankurgachi (Calcutta) in 1967, while a tall bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda came to adorn the central hall of the Vivekananda Polyclinic at Lucknow in 1977.

The closing week of the year 1980 witnessed another memorable event in the history of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission — a grand Convention of the monks, lay devotees, friends, and admirers of the Order at its Belur Math headquarters. This was the Second Convention of the Math and Mission, the first being held nearly 54 years ago in April 1926. About twelve thousand delegates attended this Convention including representatives of all the 138 branch centres of the Order in India and abroad. Its main purpose was to establish closer understanding and cooperation among the monks, lay devotees, and friends of the Order, and to impress upon their minds the idea that all of them belonged to the same spiritual family of Sri Ramakrishna, and hence had a common responsibility for educating and uplifting the masses, protecting the interests of the weaker sections of society, and at the same time rebuilding India on the basis of spirituality. Besides the huge gatherings at Belur Math, two mass meetings were arranged at Netaji Indoor Stadium in Calcutta (where

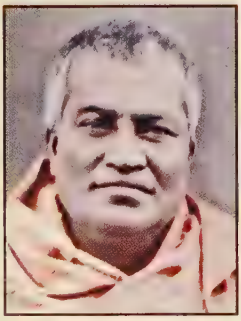
the audience numbered around fifteen thousand), and two pilgrimage tours were organized for taking the delegates to important places connected with the historical evolution of the Order — Kamarpukur, Jayrambati, Dakshineswar, Cossipore, Udbodhan, and Kankurgachi Yogodyan. Cultural functions were also staged, including a short drama on the life of Sri Ramakrishna. One important outcome of the convention was the formation of the 'Sri Ramakrishna Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Committee', whose object was to enlist the cooperation and support of all members, supporters, and sympathizers of the Order in the task of popularizing the message of the great Master and Swami Vivekananda in every nook and corner of the country. The Second Convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission aroused so much enthusiasm among the followers and members of the Order, both lay and monastic, that they are now looking forward to the next Convention of this great institution.

From 1982 onward

The period from 1982 onwards may be taken as the third phase in the post-Indian-independence history of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Swami Vireswarananda, who had been holding the office of President since 1966, passed away in March 1985 and was succeeded by Swami Gambhirananda, the then senior Vice-President, on 9 April 1985. The latter was not only a great spiritual personality but also a renowned scholar whose biographies of Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda and the *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* will be regarded as authoritative works on these subjects for years to come. Unfortunately, he did not live long to guide the Order. He attained mahāsamādhi on 27 December 1988. The office of the President then devolved upon Swami Bhuteshananda from 24 January 1989. Swami Bhuteshananda had received initiation from Swami Saradananda and the vows of sannyāsa from Swami Shivananda, both direct disciples of the Great Master. He attained mahāsamādhi on 10 August 1998. He was an unlimited source of solace to unnumbered devotees in India. Swami Ranganathananda, the then senior Vice-President, succeeded him as the President of the Order on 7 September 1998. He was Swami Shivananda's disciple, from whom he received also his monastic vows. Swami Ranganathananda was not only a great spiritual personality but also India's cultural ambassador to the world. He was internationally

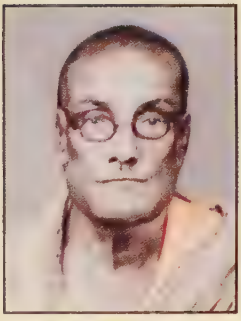
PRESIDENTS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

Swami Brahmananda



Swami Shivananda

Swami Akhandananda



Swami Vijnanananda

Swami Shuddhananda

Swami Virajananda

Swami Shankarananda

Swami Vishuddhananda

Swami Madhavananda

Swami Vireswarananda

Swami Gambhirananda

Swami Bhuteshananda

Swami Ranganathananda

Swami Gahanananda

GENERAL SECRETARIES OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

Swami Saradananda

Swami Shuddhananda

Swami Virajananda

Swami Madhavananda

Swami Vireswarananda

Swami Gambhirananda

Swami Vandanananda

Swami Hiranmayananda

Swami Gahanananda

Swami Atmasthananda

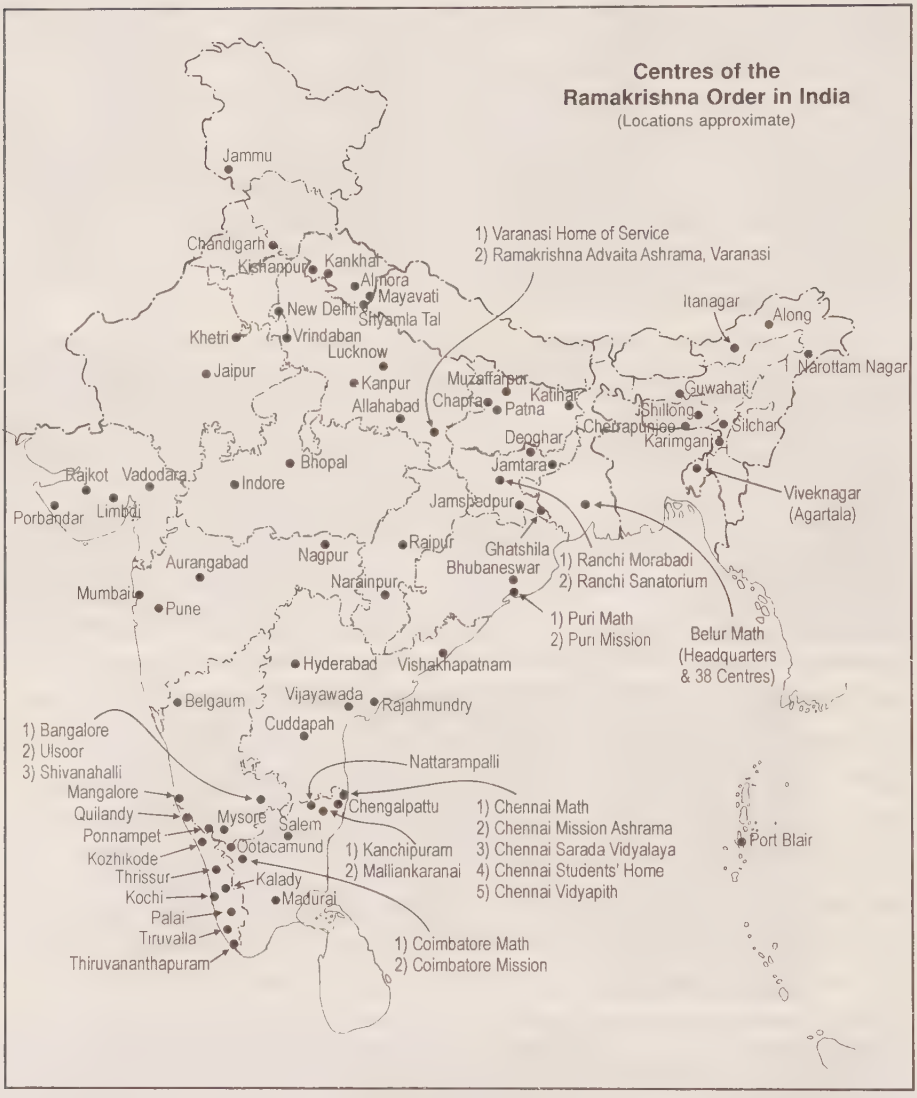
Swami Smarananda

Monks of the Ramakrishna Order during a triennial Monks' Conference in Belur Math

reputed for his stirring eloquence. Several generations of India's post-independence nation-builders drew inspiration from him. He was honoured by prestigious agencies for his relentless humanitarian and nation-building work. The Swami's recorded talks and a massive literature are a perennial source of inspiration for the posterity. He attained mahāsamādhi on 25 April 2005, which was mourned by a large number of people in India and abroad. Swami Gahanananda then assumed the office of the President on 25 May 2005. He is the disciple of Swami Virajananda who also blessed him with sannyāsa.

During the last two decades, many new centres of the Math and Mission were established, both in and outside India. In 1983 a new centre came up in Barisha, to which a Home for the aged was added in 1988. Centres were established in Pune (1984), Narainpur and Barasat (1985), Antpur, the birth place of Swami Premananda (1986), and in Madurai (1987). In early 1992, a new centre was established in Port Blair, the capital of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the foundation stone of an educational and cultural centre of the Mission was laid there three years later. Again, on the mainland of India, new centres came up at the following places: Agartala and Viveknagar (1989), Limbdi (1994), Ichapur, the birth place of Swami Ramakrishnananda (1994), Porbandar (1997), Indore (1999), Kochi (1999), Ulsoor (1999), Malliankaranai (2000), Belgaum (2000), Jammu (2000), Vijayawada (2001), Baranagore (2001), Sikra-Kulingram, the birth place of Swami Brahmananda (2002), Chapra (2003), Muzaffarpur (2003), Cooch Behar (2004), Ghatshila (2004), Vadodara (2005), Aurangabad (2005), Cuddapah (2005), Coimbatore Math (2005), and Bhopal (2006). Two important events marked the years 2004-05. In 2004 a new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission was started at the site of the birthplace and ancestral house of Swami Vivekananda, and in 2005 a deemed university known as the *Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute* (RKMVERI) was founded, which is treated as a new centre of the Order. (See the map overleaf for the centres in India.)

Outside India too new centres were started at the following places: A private centre started in Japan as early as the 1950s. It evolved into the Vedanta Society of Japan in 1984, which, in July 1993, started the publication of a bimonthly journal. The translation of Swami Vivekananda's *Rāja-yoga* into the Japanese language was also undertaken. Later many more such works were translated into the Japanese. Following Japan, new centres were founded



at Toronto, Canada (1989); Amstelveen, Netherlands (1990); and Dinajpur, Bangladesh (1990). In Moscow, after the liberalization of the political regime in Russia, a new centre came up in 1993. Further centres came up at: São Paulo, Brazil (1999); Sydney, Australia (2000); Petaling Jaya, Malaysia (2001); Chittagong, Bangladesh (2003); Bindweide, Germany (2004); and Florida, USA (2006). The Vedanta Society of Kansas City, USA, was made a sub-centre of Vedanta Society of St. Louis, USA, in 2005. The brief history of

some of these centres has been given in separate articles in this volume. Then, new temples came up at the following places: Dinajpur (1997), Kishenpur (1998), Lucknow (1999), Madras (2000), Bagerhat (2001), Habiganj (2002), Pune (2002), Dhaka (2005), Narainpur (2005), and Nagpur (2006). The Vedanta Centre of Chicago has proposed to built a new Universal Temple. Further, in May 2001, the Belur Math got its newly-built Ramakrishna Museum inaugurated. Presently (in 2006) the total number of Math and Mission centres all over the world is 163. Thus we see a steady growth in the Order during this period, both in and outside India.

The educational activities of the Math and Mission have also considerably expanded during the last two decades. In 1984 the total number of students receiving education in schools and colleges established and controlled by the Math and Mission was approximately 1,29,000. But in 1996 this number increased to about 1,60,000, out of which girl students' number was nearly 57,000 (these figures do not include students receiving their education in non-formal schools in backward, rural areas). And by the year 2003-04, around 2,00,000 students were receiving education in the Mission's institutions, with around 77,000 girls. The total expenditure incurred by the Math and Mission on their educational activities during 1996-97 was about rupees 39 crores. By 2003-04 this amount increased to rupees 91.04 crores. The quality of education imparted in the Math and Mission schools has been consistently high. The Mission's school at Along was given the *National Award for the Best Institution for Children's Welfare 1984* by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of India. This legacy of excellence has been well preserved up to this day. The National Science Olympiad Foundation, New Delhi, conferred *The Best School Award* on Deoghar Vidyapith in 2003. The Shilpayatana unit of Saradapitha centre, Belur, received *The Best School-Industry Linkage Award 2003* for the State of West Bengal from the NCERT. In the Eastern Indian Science Fair (State level) organized by NCERT in 2003, the Mission's Viveknagar School (Tripura) was conferred *The Best Science Teaching School of the State Award.* As assessed by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), an autonomous body under the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Vidyamandira College run by the Saradapitha branch of the Order in Belur was given A+ (90% to 95%) grade in 2005.[1]

We have already stated about the establishment of the deemed university RKMVERI in July 2005, which was an important event in the field of education. It was a major step fulfilling Swamiji's vision of a university at Belur Math, from where, he had prophesied, waves of spirituality would rise to inundate the globe. Under the auspices of this university, a *Vivekananda School for Fundamental Science and Philosophy* has been started, which operates a *Vivekananda Research Centre* at Swamiji's ansectral house. This also was inaugurated in July 2005.

The prestigious Vivekananda Award, instituted by the Institute of Culture, was first awarded in 1983 to Marie Louise Burke of California (known as Sister Gargi in the Ramakrishna Order) for her outstanding work, *Swami Vivekananda in the West — New Discoveries* in 6 volumes. Professor Sankari Prasad Basu of Calcutta University became the second recipient of the award three years later. In April 2000, Pandit Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya Shastri and Dr. V. R. Karandikar received this award at the hands of Swami Ranganathananda, the then President of the Order.[2]

So far as health services are concerned, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, besides its regular hospitals and charitable dispensaries, has set up many mobile medical units for rural people, particularly in the tribal areas. In 1996 the Mission had under its management 9 large hospitals in different Indian cities, and 92 charitable dispensaries and mobile medical units scattered all over the country. By 2003-04, it was running 15 hospitals with 2032 beds, 120 dispensaries, and 46 mobile units mainly catering to the needs of the rural and tribal people. Nearly rupees 13 crores were spent in 1997 for the treatment of about 50 lakhs of patients in all these hospitals and dispensaries. By 2003-04, this amount increased to rupees 32.08 crores benefiting more than 50 lakh patients. In the same year new medical units were opened in the Sevashramas of Lucknow, Vrindavan, and Bankura.

Rural development and tribal welfare work have also received due attention from the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. A multipurpose development project for the tribal people of Narainpur in the Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh was put into operation in 1985-86. It seeks to provide free primary education, vocational training, and medical treatment for the tribal community of this region. A similar project was undertaken for the tribal people of Andhra Pradesh, which envisages the opening of residential schools,

charitable dispensaries, mobile medical units, fair-price shops, and community centres (1987-88). A mobile charitable dispensary has been set up for the poor tribal people of Vishakhapatnam in the same state (1993-94).

The hill people of northeast India are very concerned about preserving their tribal identity in spite of their eagerness to imbibe Western education and enjoy the benefits of modern civilization. So, in 1993, the Mission opened a cultural centre at Cherrapunji in Meghalaya to encourage the preservation of their age-old tribal culture. Mention has been made in the preceding section about the integrated rural development work which goes under the name of 'Pallimangal', and in which the Math and Mission have been taking much interest. In 1984-85 Belur Math alone spent 6 lakhs of rupees on 'Pallimangal' activities involving improvement of methods of farming, setting up of new cottage industries, and developing fisheries. In the same year arrangements were made at Saradapitha (Belur) for giving regular training to persons interested in social service work in villages. In 1989-90 a small jute workshop was opened at Kamarpukur for providing vocational training to the rural youth of the locality. In 1996 a creche was opened at Kalady in Kerala for babies of working mothers belonging to scheduled castes, and at the same place arrangements were made for training women of these backward communities in tailoring and sewing in order to make them economically self-reliant.

In 2003-04, numerous village units were started for educating the hill tribes in Meghalaya, as well as a farming centre in Ranchi, specially meant for *ādivasis* and people belonging to the scheduled castes. By this time the Mission's Narainpur centre had made a significant contribution towards the all-round development of the local tribes. The President of India conferred *Dr. Ambedkar National Award for Social Understanding and Uplift of the Weaker Sections* for the year 1996 on the Narainpur Ashrama. In the same year the centre was presented *Bhagawan Mahaveer Foundation Award 1996* for excellence in the fields of education, health, and social service. Rural development and tribal welfare work, including various educational, medical, and cheap housing projects, cost the Math and Mission more than five and half crores of rupees in 1996. By the year 2003-04, this amount had increased to rupees 12.04 crores.

Relief and rehabilitation work have all along formed a major plank of the social service activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Such works are undertaken every year on different scales in some or the other parts of the

country because of the country's vastness and the almost regular recurrence of both natural and man-made calamities. In recent years the annual expenditure on this account has exceeded rupees five crores (5.66 crores in 2002-03), and with escalating prices it is very likely to go up in the future. But a very important feature of the relief work of the Order that deserves notice is its attempt to provide permanent rehabilitation after giving temporary relief to the affected people through the distribution of food and clothing and making provision for temporary shelter. This involves the construction of houses, schools, community centres, and even roads and bridges, and sometimes also centres of vocational training in the affected areas. Huge sums of money have been spent on building cyclone-resistant houses in coastal Andhra Pradesh (1990-91), earthquake-resistant houses in the Latur district of Maharashtra (1993-96), and modern hygienic public toilets in different rural areas of West Bengal, particularly in the district of Midnapore (1991-92). The Mission constructed a rupees 3-crore bridge, named *Vivekananda Bridge*, across the Vruddha Gautami river in an East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh as a part of its three-year long cyclone relief and rehabilitation project. The bridge was inaugurated on 12 January 2000.

When the state of Gujarat was rocked by a ravaging earthquake in January 2001, instantly the mission sent relief to the quake victims. Apart from the temporary relief in the form of food, water, clothing, etc., it took up the work of constructing permanent quake-proof houses in several of the affected places. The total cost which the Mission incurred on this was more than rupees 16 crores. Similarly, in the wake of the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, the Mission started, from the very first day of the calamity, massive relief operations through its centres in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andaman Islands, and Sri Lanka. Thousands of victims were provided primary relief costing more than rupees 1.5 crores. As the part of the rehabilitation programme, the Mission distributed fiberglass boats, catamarans, and fishing nets to the fisher-folk, the worst sufferers in the tsunami disaster. Work of constructing permanent houses was taken up along with the effort to rehabilitate children orphaned by the disaster. This massive relief operation cost the Mission around rupees 15 crores. On 8 October 2005, a powerful earthquake shook the Jammu valley causing huge casualties and destruction. The Mission immediately extended primary relief through its Jammu centre.

Needless to say, all this has been rendered possible by generous donations from the public and adequate subsidies from the Government, both of which feel assured that the money thus given will be fully and properly utilized by the dedicated monks of the Order.

In addition to the relief work within India, sometimes the Mission undertakes such work also in the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Nepal. We have already referred to the tsunami relief in Sri Lanka. In 1992, during the political and economic instability in the USSR, the Mission ventured to provide primary relief to the distressed people of Moscow. Arrangements were instantly made to dispatch milk powder, baby food, sugar, etc. to Moscow by air for immediate distribution among the needy. Similarly, in response to the request made by the Human Rights Group, Lautoka, in July 2000 the Mission's Fiji centre distributed rice, pulses, vegetables, milk powder, etc. to 342 persons who took refuge at Girmit Centre in Lautoka owing to socio-political disturbances.

Moreover, lakhs of rupees are now spent every year for awarding stipends to poor students and rendering financial assistance to needy persons, particularly the aged and the sick. Nearly 42.54 lakhs of rupees were spent in this way in 1989-90, and by 1996 this figure had gone up to rupees 84 lakhs. In the year 2003-04, a sum of 19.8 million rupees was spent for these purposes. This may also be taken as a part of the rehabilitation work of the Mission. The same thing may be said about the rebuilding and renovation of slums in cities like Calcutta, as were undertaken by the Order in 1991-92. In April 2002, a newly constructed 78-unit multistoried housing complex was inaugurated in Bagmari, Calcutta. Seventy-four poor, slum-dwelling families were accommodated there. The building complex was constructed at a cost of 13 million rupees by the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta. The land vacated by the slum-dwellers will be used for the Hospital extension.[3]

Finally, we may briefly recount some of the important activities undertaken by the Math and Mission during these years (1982 onward) to spread the message of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement within and outside India. The Committee for the Comprehensive Study of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement set up in 1982 sought to popularize the ideas and ideals of the Movement through the organization of seminars and youth conferences all over India. In 1985, Swami Vivekananda's birthday (12 January) was

declared by the Government of India as 'National Youth Day', and it was to be celebrated as such every year. This was designed to spread the life-giving message of Vivekananda among the Indian youth. An All India Youth Conference was held at Belur Math with the same object in December 1985, and was attended by thousands of young men and women from different parts of India. In 1986, the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated in India and abroad. A three-day seminar was organized in Calcutta by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in collaboration with the Science Academy and the Writers' Union of Moscow. Inter-religious discourses were arranged at many Mission centres outside India on this occasion. The 125th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was observed during the year 1987-88 throughout India in a befitting manner.

The centenary of Swamiji's remarkable appearance at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago (September 1893) was also celebrated with due eclat during 1993-94, and a number of learned publications were brought out, dealing with different aspects of Swamiji's life and thought and their impact on India and other countries. A memorial plaque was later put up at the Fullerton Hall of the Art Institute of Chicago where Swamiji had delivered his memorable address on 11 September 1893. The section of Michigan Avenue which runs in front of the Art Institute has of late been named 'Vivekananda Way', as a tribute to the prophet of international goodwill and harmony. The year 1995 happened to be the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's visit to the Thousand Island Park, where he had delivered his *Inspired Talks*. The event was celebrated in a grand manner by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York. It presented a bronze plaque to the Park authorities in honour of Swamiji in July 1997. The plaque reads: 'In remembrance of the historic visit of Swami Vivekananda, Thousand Island Park, June 18 - August 7, 1895.' The Thousand Island Park Corporation has voted to permanently install this plaque on the Main Dock Pavilion to commemorate the place where Swamiji arrived by ferryboat in 1895.[4] A quaterly journal, *Global Vedanta*, was started by the Order's Seattle centre in 1996, to carry the message of the Holy Trio and Vedanta among a wider circle.

The year 1997 was witness to several historic events in the Ramakrishna Movement. The centenary of Swamiji's visit to Sri Lanka on his way back from the West, and then his return to the motherland, was celebrated in a

grand manner by the Mission's Colombo centre in Sri Lanka and the centres in India. The centres in Tamil Nadu, led by the Madras Math, jointly organized a marathon series of programmes spanning 21 days and covering a distance of 700 kilometres. The convoy passed through several important places in Tamil Nadu, everywhere receiving overwhelming response. In the February of that year, Calcutta witnessed three public functions under the auspices of the Ramakrishna Mission in remembrance of Swamiji's return to this city after his triumphant tour in the West exactly one hundred years ago. An All India Youth Convention was held on the 3rd and 4th February, which attracted nearly 7000 delegates. This was followed by an All India Devotees' Convention attracting nearly 10,000 people. Another huge public meeting was held at the Deshabandhu Park in North Calcutta on 23rd February and was addressed by many important public figures, intellectuals, and monks of the Ramakrishna Order.

That year was also the centenary year of the Ramakrishna Mission, a historical landmark in the epoch-making saga of spirituality and service initiated by Swami Vivekananda. A year long celebration was inaugurated by the Vice-President of India in an impressive function held at Nazrul Manch, Calcutta, on 1st May. On this occasion was realeased the ninth volume of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* by the Governor of West Bengal. This year-long celebration of 1997, organized on a wide scale, went a long way in spreading the message of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda among the masses of India, and even abroad. The celebration was concluded in February 1998. Following this, in July 1998, the first full-size bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda was unveiled in Chicago. About a 1000 persons had participated in that function.

The next important event to be noted was the conferment of the prestigious *Gandhi Peace Prize* for the year 1998 by the President of India on Ramakrishna Mission. In an impressive function held at Raj Bhavan, Calcutta, on 13 February 1999, the prize was received by Swami Ranganathananda, the 13th President of the Order. Its citation in part reads:

> The Gandhi Peace Prize instituted by the Government of India honours truly those dedicated to the thought and action that reflect the Gandhian world view. It is for the first time this prize is being awarded to an institution, Ramakrishna Mission. ...The Ramakrishna Mission exemplifies the Gandhian spirit

> of selfless and active social action. In bestowing the Gandhian Peace Prize for 1998 on the Ramakrishna Mission, the Government of India honours an organization which has rendered service to humanity over the past century with a sense of commitment that reflects Gandhian thought and practice.[5]

Continuing the chronology of events responsible for spreading the message of the Ramakrishna Movement in India and abroad, we need to mention about the Vedanta Societies of New York and Chicago, which held unique conferences in the year 2000 and 2001 respectively. The focus of these conferences was on the 'Role of Vedanta in the Third Millennium'. The 'Spiritual Oneness of Humanity' formed the theme of another great gathering held under the auspices of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York in 2002.

Then, following the *Gandhi Peace Prize* was the recognition of the Ramakrishna Mission by the UNESCO. When Aung San Suu Kyi of Myamnar was named the laureate of the *UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize for Promotion of Tolerance and Non-violence 2002* by the UNESCO Director General, Koichiro Masuura, on the unanimous recommendation of an international jury, the jury also decided to attribute five Honourable Mentions. The fourth Honourable Mention was given to the Ramakrishna Mission 'for its unrelenting efforts to promote the principles of tolerence and non-violence in assisting disadvantaged groups.'[6] This honorary mention highlights UNESCO's recognition of Ramakrishna Mission's continuous activities to make peace and happiness prevail among the people, regardless of caste or religious beliefs. In September 2002, the Mission also participated in an inter-religious conference on *Dialogue for Peace: The Contribution of Religions to Living Together*, organized by Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Turkey.

The year 2003 witnessed another important event. It was Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary, and the year-long celebration organized on that account. In this celebration, the special emphasis was on the welfare of the poor and distressed women. The centres of the Order, both in India and abroad, celebrated this event in a befitting manner. There was a week-long celebration at the Mother's birth place, Jayrambati. The Madras Math took out a decorated *ratha* (chariot), which visited 54 towns in different parts of Tamil Nadu. Everywhere the response was overwhelming. Subsidized books related to Mother were brought out in the vernaculars. The three journals

of the Madras centre released their special issues on this occasion. A CD on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother was also released by that centre. Women's and girl-students' conferences, seminars, public meetings, cultural programmes and spiritual retreats, etc. formed the part of this celebration. Service programmes of a permanent nature, such as organizing self-help groups for women, providing drinking-water supply, sinking tube-wells, training village women in tailoring, etc. were also taken up as a part of the celebration. Even the centres abroad befittingly celebrated the occasion. To state just a few, the Vedanta Society of Northern California conducted a special programme attended by around 1000 devotees. The Japanese translations of the two books on Holy Mother, viz. *The Life of Holy Mother* by Swami Nikhilananda and *The Gospel of Holy Mother*, were released in January 2005, marking this occasion. This year-long celebration concluded in a grand meeting held at Belur Math in January 2005, which was attended by thousands of devotees from all parts of the country.

While discussing the events which spread the message of the Ramakrishna Movement, we need to mention two unique projects started recently. In August 2004, the Madras Math launched a project called *Viveka Murasu Village Awareness Programme*. It aims at carrying the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda to the interior villages of Tamil Nadu. By organizing bookstalls, exhibitions, and religious meetings with the help of audio-visual aids, it tries to reach the masses. The programme has received an overwhelming response. Within six months of its inception, it has reached 38,768 students of 102 educational institutions as well as 17,625 persons in 133 villages and towns spread over 12 districts of Tamil Nadu.[7] Akin to this project is the other one started by the Mysore centre. It is called *Jnana Vahini*.

All these events and programmes have been so many channels for the message of the Great Master to reach people everywhere. The description of the events that spread the message of the Ramakrishna Movement during this period in the West (especially America) has been given in another article, 'Ramakrishna Movement in America — An Overview of the Years from 1970'.

Thus, the ideas and ideals of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement are now rapidly spreading all over India and the world. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission has proved to be the most important and effective vehicle

for the dissemination of these noble and life-giving ideals, because it has demonstrated how they can be put into practice.

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Ramakrishna Movement in America
THE EARLY PHASE (1893-1920)

SWAMI VEDANANDA

THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT'S work in the West began at seven o'clock in the evening of Tuesday, 25 July 1893, when Swami Vivekananda, alone, unheralded and unnoticed, disembarked at the port of Vancouver, Canada. Ostensibly, the Swami had come only to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions that was to be held at the great fair of Chicago. This purpose, however, was second to the Swami's main object, which was to get financial help from America for his cherished object of raising the condition of the poor in India.*

Initially there was no plan at all to start a 'Movement' in the West, with its associated need for an organization, centres of work, finances, etc. In fact, for a long time, Swamiji was actually opposed to organized work of this type.

As a wandering monk, alone and freely moving from place to place in India, he had been overwhelmed by the misery of the large numbers of oppressed and suffering people. Their misery pained him to the very depths of his

* There is actually enough evidence to believe that Swamiji's decision to attend the Parliament of Religions had been conditioned by a two-fold vision. In the first place, Swamiji had the conviction that it had been divinely ordained he should go to the West as the Messenger of India's spiritual wisdom which found its best expression in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Secondly, Swamiji believed that, after the Parliament, it might be possible for him to collect funds in America for his project of uplifting the poor masses in India. This belief did not materialize, for Swamiji could collect little funds in America for his work — *The Editors*.

being, and he restlessly searched for a solution. Yet, alone and without help or resources as he was, what could he do to help them? At Kanyakumari, in the vision that had come to him during meditation, he had beheld the past and the future of India, the glory of the past, the present degradation, and the yet greater glory of the future. He had seen that the wandering sannyāsins of India, starting with his own brother sannyāsins, the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, represented a great reservoir of power. He foresaw that, if motivated, they could become a source of energy powerful enough to awaken the people to their plight, educate them to the realities of the world around them, and thus empower them to lift themselves out of their misery. This would require, in India, money to furnish the means and an organization to sustain the effort. India, however, impoverished and weakened as she was, either had no money or lacked the motivation to use it in this way. The West also lacked the motivation, but it had the money. When news of the forthcoming Parliament of Religions reached India, and some of Swamiji's admirers urged him to attend it to represent Hinduism, it seemed natural to use this opportunity to accomplish his cherished object.

In the West at first, however, Swamiji seems to have felt that it would be enough to lay India's deep need before the Americans and at the same time to open before them the dazzling display of India's spiritual treasures. In return then the Americans would come to the assistance of India with their financial and material resources. This required, in the West, no organization beyond, at most, a simple committee of like-minded people to handle the financial affairs. In fact, the New York Vedanta Society, founded in 1894, functioned at first in this capacity only. Yet, other needs arose, such as arranging for the publication of books to spread the spiritual teachings, and arranging for places to hold the lectures and classes. Even then Swamiji seems not to have felt that his efforts constituted a Movement as such. As late as 1895, he instructed his newly ordained sannyāsins that they were free to teach and do spiritual ministration each in his or her own way. He felt that he had given to them all that he had to give and that henceforth each was free to use it as they saw fit.

During his stay in America and Europe, however, it gradually became clear to Swami Vivekananda, that — if India had deep material needs — the West had spiritual needs that were as deep and whose solution was, in fact, vital to the future of mankind as a whole. The challenges of the present epoch,

Swamiji saw, in the East as well as in the West, require a new holistic outlook, a new civilization, based on the eternal universal spiritual truths found in the Vedanta, but stated in the language of modern times, and purified of merely local usages. Also required was a heart ready to respond to the needs of everyone, a universality of outlook, and an all-encompassing openness to new ideas as exemplified in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. In this way, what has been called the 'Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement' gradually came into being in the West. The early part of the development of this process covering the period from 1893 to 1920 will be followed, at least in outline, in the pages that follow.

I

On Sunday, 30 July 1893, Swami Vivekananda arrived by train in Chicago, and found that the Parliament of Religions would not open until September. The world's fair exhibition, however, was in progress and Swamiji frequently visited the grounds where enormous pavilions displayed glittering achievements in all fields of modern endeavour. Swamiji, however, having just come from the open roads of India where he could easily have begged his food from door to door and slept under a tree or taken shelter of one of the many temples, was now faced with the enormous expense and complexity of modern life which did not look with favour on either begging or homeless wandering. Having been advised that Boston was a cheaper place, he set out by train. Because of the dazzling brilliance of his personality, he soon attracted a group of devoted acquaintances who were proud to be his hosts and introduce him to American life. In Boston and in the seaside resort of Annisquam, in Salem and in the health resort of Saratoga Springs, in private gatherings and in public places, Swamiji had his first acquaintance with western life and western society on its home grounds. It was at this time that he met Professor John Henry Wright, a professor at Harvard University, which was then, and still is, one of the most prestigious seats of learning in America. The professor and his family were tremendously impressed by Swamiji's dynamic personality and seemingly limitless learning. It was Professor Wright who wrote to the authorities in charge of issuing credentials to the Parliament of Religions — credentials that Swamiji had not thought to procure for himself — that this Indian monk was

more learned than all the learned professors of America put together and that he was in no more in need of credentials than the sun had need of credentials in order to shine. Had the professor not issued such a ringing endorsement of Swamiji, it is quite possible that Swamiji might not have been allowed to appear at the parliament at all.

This was the beginning of his work. To all he met, he gave out new and awakening ideas, uplifting discourses, and the magnetism of his inspiring presence. He explained the manners and customs of India, being himself — in their eyes — an amazing curio from India. He sought their sympathy and help for the poor of his land, explaining, in the midst of these devoted supporters of Christian missionary work, that India's need lay not in religion but in industrial and social education. He preached the religion of truth, chastity, and the brotherhood of man. Though he found himself severely criticized by the clergy, and at times persecuted because of his strange dress and appearance, he showed himself extremely generous to people of other faiths and outlooks, having only kind words for those who differed from him.

He met many people of widely differing backgrounds. He spoke to a group of children. He even visited a reformatory prison for women and marvelled at its facilities for rehabilitation and correction. In summary, he acquired his first real exposure to American people, experiencing their customs and needs at first hand. Thus when he finally faced the great religious conclave in Chicago, it did not represent to him a totally alien culture.

Swami Vivekananda's appearance at the Parliament of Religions was immediately preceded by a very touching incident. On his return journey to Chicago, Swamiji found that he had lost the address of the offices of the organizing committee of the Parliament of Religions. Furthermore, though he had met a fellow passenger on the train who had assured him that he would help him to reach these offices, that man had disappeared when the train reached Chicago. To make matters worse, Swamiji found himself in a quarter of the city where mostly Germans lived and he could not make himself understood. Night was coming on, and Swamiji, who was soon to be the lion of Chicago society, who was soon to be famous throughout the nation, was compelled to seek the shelter of a freight car in the Chicago railway yard for the night. The next morning, dishevelled and weary, he started wandering around the streets, asking for directions, seeking help, being refused everywhere as a vagabond

Prof. John Henry Wright

Mrs. George W. Hale

Swami Vivekananda among the delegates of the Parliament

Swami Vivekananda in Chicago Parliament of Religions, 1893

and a stranger. Then, filled with the spirit of renunciation and total surrender to the Lord, exhausted to helplessness, he sat down on the curb of the street and waited. At this point, from the house on the opposite side of the street, a dignified lady emerged, came to him, and gently inquired if he was a delegate to the Parliament of Religions. This was Mrs. George Hale, who became in fact a mother to him throughout his years in the West, and whose husband, daughters, nieces, all adopted him as their own and gave him the warmest and most heartfelt support — a support that in many respects was indispensable for the success of his mission.

On 11 September 1893 Swami Vivekananda achieved instantaneous fame and the enthusiastic approval from the assembled thousands with the simple words: 'Sisters and Brothers of America.' It is still not fully understood what caused this instantaneous acclaim, but from the point of view of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta Movement, which was in a sense born at that moment, it is sufficient to mention a few ideas, speculative though they may be. For one thing, women were — and in some respects still are — discriminated against in many cultures of the world. The generous, heartfelt and endearing call to his 'Sisters' first of all, rather than the usual, formal and often abused term 'Ladies', established a relationship of equality and yet absolute purity with all the women present — and in that audience, women would have been in the majority. The whole phrase 'Sisters and Brothers of America' was in fact a call to a new age, just then dawning. The whole Parliament of Religions was motivated by just this idea, although some of the organizers were hoping for more sectarian advantages. Here, at the very inauguration of this conclave, this magnificent sentiment, the very hope of the new age, was being voiced with intensity. It was actually the keynote of the assembly, and continues to this day to be the keynote for us also and for the years to come.

Swamiji's work during the Parliament was enormous. Not only did he give interviews to the press, attend innumerable receptions, distribute a pamphlet concerning the life and personality of Sri Ramakrishna (using for this purpose the article written much earlier by P. C. Mazoomdar), appear at numerous sectional meetings of the Parliament, but he also wrote his magnificent paper on Hinduism. This manifesto was his contribution to India as well as to the West, because he gave therein such a broad and inclusive statement of the religion that it was elevated above all sects and all narrowness to become

a truly universal faith. In fact, Swamiji frequently thereafter spoke on the ideal of a Universal Religion, as broad as the heavens above, embracing the best in all individual religions without sacrificing the depth in each, accepting all the prophets of the past, yet open to receive all truths that might be discovered in future — deep as the ocean, yet broad as the sky. No wonder that he was acclaimed wherever he went — his was the voice of the coming age which was feeling a desperate need for ideas such as these: 'I think that we should love our brother whether we believe in the universal fatherhood of God or not, because every religion and every creed recognizes man as divine, and you should do him no harm that you might not injure that which is divine in him.' 'The Hindu religion does not consist in attempts to believe a certain doctrine — not in believing, but in being and becoming... by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God, "becoming perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect."' 'Not from error to truth, but... from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth.'

After the Parliament of Religions, Swamiji continued to stay around Chicago for some time, accepting many speaking engagements and being welcomed by society everywhere. He then engaged himself to a lecture bureau which sent him travelling to innumerable small towns across the whole of the American Middle West from the Canadian border to the southern states, and from Ohio to Minnesota, all this in the dead of a winter, the severity of which cannot be imagined by someone from the plains of India. Temperatures of 40 degrees below zero are not unknown there, along with intensely cold winds. These small towns, moreover, are known for their parochial outlook and lack of intellectual breadth.

The question naturally arises as to why Swami Vivekananda would choose to undergo such hardships? Of course, as he did always, he was studying western methods of education and material advancement to take back to India and apply to the solution of Indian problems. For some time also he tried to raise money for his project of starting a scheme for the education and uplift of the poor and oppressed in India. It soon became clear to him, however, that — in spite of their acclaim of him and eagerness to hear him personally — the average American was not responsive to his project, and his efforts to raise money proved fruitless. Furthermore, it was all that he could do to raise enough funds just to keep himself in this land where begging is actually outlawed and

entails the possibility of being arrested for vagrancy. Furthermore, the spirit of sannyāsa was a part of his very being, and the handling of money was always distasteful to him.

Nevertheless, in spite of the hardships of this Midwestern tour, Swamiji was actively preaching the message of Vedanta. He spoke against exclusivity, emphasizing that God is in every religion — which was not the prevalent idea in that area in those days. He preached against making church attendance simply a matter of fashion, and he inveighed against a shopkeeping religion ('give me this and give me that'). He preached a God of love from whom we ask nothing, and to whom we yearn only to give everything. He spoke of the Motherhood of God as a better fulfilment of the idea of love. He emphasized that 'Hypocrisy cannot exist where God is.'[1] We should want God with the intensity that a man held under water wants air. 'We are all divine... In each is a divine spirit that survives the body and the mind, and which is a part of the absolute.' He criticized the methods of Christian missionaries, and he also tried to correct prevalent distorted conceptions of India by giving a truer picture. He pleaded for a spirit of universal tolerance. He spoke of the perfectibility of humanity, that Adam's fall was a fall from original purity, and he urged a return to the original perfection through the practice of holiness and love.

We can still ask, however, why Swamiji spent so much of his limited strength in the midst of this terrible winter in the small towns of this conservative area. The real answer is not known, but Sister Gargi in her carefully researched six-volume biography of Swamiji in the West analyzes this problem. First of all, Swamiji was, we know, in a state of very high spiritual consciousness, in fact on at least one occasion he had been about to merge in samādhi except for the appearance of Sri Ramakrishna at that time who held him back from it.[2] Further, according to a contemporary description, he was one whose 'face shone with divine light, whose words were fire, whose very presence created an atmosphere of harmony and purity, thereby drawing all souls to himself.'[3] Furthermore, he always maintained that he was actively guided by Sri Ramakrishna in every move. In fact he can be considered from every standpoint as a divine messenger or Prophet. The Middle West, moreover, though tending to be insular, was actively religious — not neutral or indifferent — and it was the heartland of America, but its outlook was in need of being made broader and deeper. Swamiji, filled as he was with the love of God, infused

great power into this region. He instilled his spirit into the heart of America, planting the seeds of spirituality naturally wherever he went. Viewed in this light, one could regard this period of his life as being of profound spiritual significance: When the soil is hard and rocky, one must work harder to make an impression on it, and Swamiji worked intensely during this time. He himself said of this period: 'The conflagration that has set in through the grace of the Guru will not be put out.'[4] Swamiji himself said about his lectures that he did not simply lecture but gave his hearers something spiritual and tangible, and that they knew they had received it. For the time being he lifted their minds so that they could get a taste of the rarefied region which was his natural abode. One could perhaps say that by planting living seeds of spirituality in this heartland of America, he ensured the spiritual success of the whole mission.

Starting in this period also, Swamiji's opponents, especially the missionaries and conservative Christian preachers, made concerted efforts, especially at Detroit in 1894, to counter his great popularity. Swamiji, however, rose to the occasion and, with great vigour, was able to hold his own in this contest. In fact, America is indebted to Swami Vivekananda for removing the barbs of suspicion and hatred that blocked the influx of Eastern thought into the country. Henceforward, in the ensuing decades, this ever increasing current from the East deluged America, greatly enriching and deepening the national life.

Of this period, Merlin Marie Snell, assistant to the chairman of the Parliament of Religions, had this to say about America at that time:

> America is starving for spiritual nourishment in spite of its absorption in material things...there are many souls scattered everywhere throughout its great population who are thirsting for higher things. Europe has always been indebted to India for its spiritual aspirations...[5]

The next important period in the Swami's stay in America was his attendance in July of 1894 at the conference of new and alternative religions held at Greenacre in Maine on the East Coast, where for the first time he could function in the traditional fashion of Indian spiritual teachers -- sitting with his students in the grass under the trees -- freely teaching the highest spiritual truths to the unconventional and eager students who crowded around him:

> You and I and everything in the universe are that Absolute, not parts but the whole... I teach them all 'Shivoham, Shivoham' and they all repeat it, innocent and pure as they are, and brave beyond all bounds — and I am happy and glorified.

Yet Swamiji also saw the deep needs of the people around him: 'They are a dry sort of people. They do not understand Madhava, the Sweet One... They drag the spiritual to the material plane.' He taught them love for love's sake. He also spoke of Rāja-Yoga and Kuṇḍalini.

Many people helped Swamiji in carrying on his work in the West. In this respect, one must mention here the indispensable assistance of Mrs. Ole Bull, the widow of a famous Norwegian violinist, who acted as his manager, adviser, and arranger of his programme of activities, also giving financial contributions to the work in India. Swamiji had enormous confidence in her practical wisdom. Miss Ellen Waldo took down his dictation of his book on Rāja-Yoga, his translation and commentary on the Patanjali Yoga Aphorisms. Miss Josephine MacLeod, who throughout her long life gave unstinting help to the Ramakrishna Order in countless ways, was one of his most devoted followers.

By the beginning of 1895 Swami Vivekananda embarked on a new dimension of his work in the West. He had long since pushed his own plans for gathering support for his Indian work into the background. Now he became convinced that the lecture platform and large scale work could not answer to the deep spiritual hunger that he saw around him. He saw a profound ignorance of basic spiritual truths and a great lack of systematic spiritual practice and experience. He determined therefore to concentrate his efforts on small classes where a few dedicated individuals might receive intensive training. Large public lectures with paid admission were given at intervals also, but mainly to raise money to support the classes, which were entirely free of charge. Swamiji also gave 'parlour' lectures at devotees' houses. In addition he realized that, since he would return to India in the not too distant future, all this work would quickly lose momentum and disappear unless some of the students were empowered to teach, and unless some literature were available to support the teaching. Swamiji therefore began to urge that the lectures and classes be recorded and edited for publication. He formed the Vedanta Society in New York in 1894 for the purpose of looking after the publication and the arrange-

ments for the lectures. To carry out these assignments, the Society consisted at that time of officers only, without a membership roll.

He emphasized that behind all appearance is the One Reality. 'Unselfishness is the denial of the lower or apparent self.' Realization was given the primary emphasis: To raise the level of consciousness, to actually perceive oneself and the world not as matter, but as spirit. Swamiji felt himself more in his element in this new format. He writes:

> ...we cook some rice and lentils or barley and quietly eat it, and write something or read or receive visits from poor people who want to learn something, and thus I feel I am more of a sannyāsin now than I ever was in America.

But Swamiji clearly saw the actual dimensions of his work: 'I am to create a new order of humanity here who are sincere believers in God and care nothing for the world. This must be slow, very slow.'[6] 'We must plunge heart and soul and body into the work. And until we be ready to sacrifice everything else to one idea and to one alone, we never, never see the light.'[7]

Swamiji was to say much later to Swami Turiyananda: 'I have made a new path and opened it to all.'[8] The divinity inherent in all human beings must be made manifest 'in every movement of life'. Devoting all energy to the spiritual quest, however, did not at all preclude, but, in fact, utilized, consciousness of the material needs of the world — one must be determined to take all others also along with oneself on the path to nirvana. Swamiji wanted to find a practical and unified answer to the many problems facing the modern world. In this Sri Ramakrishna was for Swamiji a complete and universal being, combining within himself every mode of God and every ideal of man; and in this sense Vedanta gave the theory that was inclusive of all human aspirations, efforts and achievements, and Sri Ramakrishna was its living embodiment.

There were many lectures on religious harmony. He expressed the view that one Eternal Religion manifested itself as the different world religions, like the same light coming through glasses of different colours. There were many lectures on the future Universal Religion 'which will have no location in place and time, which will be infinite like the God it will preach... which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every

human being,... and whose scope, whose whole force will be centred in aiding humanity to realize its own true divine nature... Each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve its individuality and grow according to (its) own law of growth.'[9]

There was emphasis also on Buddha and Buddhism, and its encouraging of self-reliance, of reason followed to its limits, which looks to nullification of all self and 'which alone can bridge the gap between matter and spirit'. The compassion, the humanity and largeness of spirit, the great sympathy of Buddha were dwelt upon.

In the summer of 1895 Swami Vivekananda reached what, in some respects, was the high point of his teaching mission to the West. This occurred during his long sojourn in a cottage at Thousand Island Park with a very small group of extremely eager students. He once claimed that 'I cannot speak. I cannot write, but I can think deeply, and when heated can speak fire. But it must be to a few, a very select few. Let them take these ideas if they like and spread them... that is only a just division of labour.' At Thousand Island Park he wanted to give these students intensive training, so that some of them, at least, could carry on the work of teaching in his absence. To that end he initiated them as disciples, and also conferred on some of them the vows of brahmacharya and sannyāsa. One of the newly ordained sannyāsins was a woman. These were ground-breaking steps and served to formally commit the work to the same high ideals of chastity, purity, and renunciation that are the expected norm of monks and nuns everywhere. At that point the work really became a Movement for it now had totally dedicated members fully committed to its ideals: 'The yellow robe of the sannyāsin is the sign of the free. Give up this beggar's dress of the world; wear the flag of freedom, the ochre robe.'[10] 'Yellow garbed sannyāsins will be common here and in England.'[11]

In that small cottage by the majestic St. Lawrence river, surrounded by woods, Swamiji indeed was 'heated' and 'spoke fire'. All of religion came under purview. He started with the Gospel according to St. John, whose beginning, in verses 1 to 5, he held to represent the essence of Christianity and the profoundest philosophy. He also took up in turn many other scriptures, such as the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Yoga Sūtras*, as well as selected verses from the Upaniṣads, the *Brahma Sūtras*, and the *Avadhūta Gita*. He spoke to them of Sri Ramakrishna, of the Divine Mother, and also described

to them the path of devotion. 'The more our bliss is within, the more spiritual we are.' And yet he said, 'Seek truth for truth's sake. Look not for bliss.' In discussing verses from the *Brahma Sūtras*, he brought in the three commentaries of the three major Vedantic schools of dualism, qualified non-dualism, and non-dualism, but the qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja remained the favourite with the students. Flashes of brilliance illuminated whole areas of philosophy and epoch making statements constantly poured from the Swami:

> Each attribute is the whole of God, and this signifying the whole by one quality is the metaphysical explanation of the personal God... It is the reality of the universe as seen through our mind... As human beings we have to see the trinity of existence — God, man, nature, and we cannot do otherwise... The highest imagination that can break all the links of the chain is that of the Personal God... Fearlessness is not possible as long as we have even God over us; we must be God... We created God in our image... so long as you hold yourself separated by a hair's breadth from this Eternal One. fear cannot go.[12]

Swamiji also gave emphasis to certain areas of spiritual life that were, in those days especially, and even today, not much discussed. He spoke of the need of a guru or spiritual guide, but also of its non-necessity from an ultimate point of view. He uttered a fiery call to spiritual discrimination between the eternal and the perishable, and emphasized that a strong indomitable spirit of renunciation was imperative. Further, for the serious spiritual life, chastity is essential. He made it clear that these students could not be proper vessels to spread his message if the vow of chastity was not observed.

He brought the highest non-dualistic thought from caves and forests into all aspect of everyday life — yet, remembering that we have to act on the stage of this world, he described also the plane of qualified non-dualism, the plane of God, soul, and nature — the worship of God as Mother, the infinite energy. 'This will lead to purity, and tremendous energy will come here in America.' 'The very idea of God is love.' 'Do not seek for Him. Just see Him.' 'The seeing of many is the great sin of all the world. See all as Self and love all. Let all ideas of separateness go.'

In the summer of 1895, Swami Vivekananda crossed the Atlantic on what he felt to be an exploratory trip to England. 'In no time at all, and with very

little effort on his part, London opened to Swamiji.' Whereas, in America he had had to battle against the opposition of the churches, in England the 'Anglican Church was very cordial to him, as were also the freethinkers, the radicals, ...scientists, ...at least one high ranking (government) official, orientalists and scholars — all were his ...no door in the city was closed to him.'[13] English culture was at the heart of western culture, and Swamiji saw it as 'the greatest machine that ever existed for the dissemination of ideas.' Swamiji felt that he should take this opportunity to insert his ideas into the heart of this efficient machine.

The two American sannyāsins who had received their vows at Thousand Island Park, Swamis Kripananda and Abhayananda, were carrying on the work of teaching in America in Swamiji's absence. They were holding classes in New York, Detroit, and Buffalo, teaching meditation, giving spiritual initiation, even giving the vows of brahmacharya. Swami Vivekananda, seeing that activities were now spread over two continents, and because he would soon return to America, now wrote to his brother sannyāsins in India to send one of their number to London to take up the work in his absence. This was a further step in the growth of the Movement. In time Swami Saradananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was to land in England, just before Swamiji's return to that country in 1896.

On his return from England to America in November 1895, Swamiji again resumed his classes held in his lodgings to an audience of 70 or 80 people. He described the disciplines of the different major paths to realization, the yogas, advocating a harmonious combination of all. There was to be no condemnation of the world. Nor was the world ignored as unreal; the world was deified, being transfigured as a path to freedom. Vedanta and yoga were given a new turn, and made fully relevant and effective under the conditions existing today.

Swamiji said: 'I could have thousands (of people) at my lectures if I wanted them, (but) it is the sincere student who will make the work a success, and not merely the large audiences.' But in those small lodgings, even an audience of 70 would be quite crowded: They sat on sofas, on chairs rented or borrowed, on the floor, even on the wash stand. They sat enthralled. 'Do you think that I only lecture?' Swamiji said. 'I know that I give tangible, living spirituality to them, and they know they receive it.' The subtlety of his thought and arguments swept them off their feet. 'It is absolutely necessary to worship

God as man, and blessed are those races which have such God-men.' The teachings of Vedanta could be followed directly, but they could also be viewed as helps to those who followed other religions or no religion at all. Purity, living one's life spiritually, and realization alone are religion. Societies and organizations will come of themselves.

Swamiji also gave the sannyāsa ideal a further enhancement: 'The ordinary sannyāsin gives up the world, goes out, and thinks of God. The real sannyāsin lives in the world, but is not of it... Stand in the whirl of action and reach the centre. If you have found the centre, you cannot be moved.'[14]

It also became clear to Swamiji that a literature was needed to sustain the Movement, and he accordingly put emphasis on the proper recording of his lectures, their subsequent editing, and their publication. In this way books of his lectures and writings were published to help sustain the work in his absence. This was one of the main functions of the newly formed Vedanta Society of New York. From December 1895 to the middle of 1896, Josiah J. Goodwin became instrumental in taking accurate shorthand notes of Swamiji's inspired and rapid flow of words.

As he was preparing to end his sojourn in the United States, Swamiji, with the eye of a seer, was able to assess the significance of his work in the West so far: 'I have just begun my work; in America I have raised only one or two waves; a tidal wave must be raised; society must be turned upside down; the world must be given a new civilization.'[15] 'I have only laid the foundation of the work. If future preachers follow my path, a good deal of work may be done in time.'[16]

Swami Vivekananda returned to London for a second visit in 1896, and continued his classes and public lectures. He was living in an exalted spiritual mood. Swamiji said:

> You see, at night I go to my room and lie down. I keep quiet for a while, and then within me so much bliss arises that I cannot stay lying down. I see the Blissful Mother. Men, animals, the sky, the earth — all are saturated with bliss. I cannot lie down any longer; so I get up and dance in the middle of the room. That bliss can no longer be confined within my heart. The whole world becomes filled with it, as it were.... Be happy. Don't be depressed; the Mother is everywhere; all will be filled with bliss.[17]

Swami Saradananda was asked by Swamiji to go America to take charge of the work there, moving between Boston and New York and their suburbs. He also lectured at the Greenacre Conference, as Swamiji had done. Swami Abhedananda arrived in England from India and began to take part in the work. The work in London grew. A few devoted disciples began to gather who were to be a major help to Swamiji in his later work in India — Miss Müller, Captain and Mrs. Sevier, Miss Margaret Noble, as well as E. T. Sturdy and others. In the intellectual field, outstanding scholars gave their support: F. Max Müller, and Paul Deussen, the former offering to write and publish a biography of Sri Ramakrishna, along with a collection of his sayings. Highly respected ministers of the Anglican clergy admired him. Many intellectuals saw in the Vedanta philosophy a support for their own views. The work was moving along splendidly when Swamiji felt an inner inspiration — actually an impulse from the Lord, as he wrote to a close follower — to return to India without delay. Those about him felt that it would be detrimental for him to leave just then — but Swamiji, totally absorbed in God as he was, and completely detached from all mundane calculations of profit and loss — pushed on with preparations for the immanent departure for India. Furthermore, he could clearly see that under all the present encouraging developments in London, there was no stable foundation. He said: 'Of course, as soon as I leave, most of this fabric will tumble down...'[18] 'In America there is room for twenty preachers of Vedanta and yoga. Where to get these preachers and where also the money to bring them? Half of the United States can be conquered in ten years, given a number of strong and genuine men. Where are they?'

Swamiji ended his work in London as he had ended his work in America, with a tribute to Sri Ramakrishna, who, as he saw, was holding his hands and making him do everything that he did. 'The real thing is the religion taught by Sri Ramakrishna, let Hindus call it Hinduism — and others call it in their own way.' 'I preach only what is good for universal humanity. Religion is that which does not depend on books or teachers or prophets or saviours, and that which does not make us dependent in this or in any other [life or] upon others. In this sense the advaitism of the Upaniṣads is the only religion.'[19] Swamiji equated this 'pure Upaniṣadic religion' with the universal teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, which he knew had been fully exemplified, empowered and made accessible to all by Sri Ramakrishna's life, and which formed always

the dominant aspect of his mission. He wanted 'to bring the best of India to the whole world and the best of the modern world to India. He wanted to flood the West with spirituality and India with material prosperity, and this not by disturbing the basic culture of either, but by stimulating each to borrow from the other and to flourish in its own way... to develop its own tradition of a new type of men and women, strong, compassionate, open-minded, and wise in the knowledge of man's true nature and purpose... The awakening message of Sri Ramakrishna would everywhere bring about a new order of humanity.'[20] Swami Vivekananda himself commented succinctly on this first period of the Ramakrishna Movement's work in the West with the following words:

> Whatever I had, I have left in (the West). During the lectures a power used to emanate from this body and would infuse the audience. The thought current of the country underwent a change. That was no easy matter.[21]

We must here mention the help that Swamiji received for his work in England from Mr. E. T. Sturdy, who invited him to England, arranged for his classes and lectures, housed him and published some of his lectures. Miss Henrietta Müller gave him significant financial help and other support. Special mention must be made also of Captain and Mrs. Sevier, who became such staunch supporters that they enthusiastically took up his visionary suggestion of the need of a monastery on the heights of the Himalayas where the purest advaita philosophy could be put into practice. They purchased and established the ashrama at Mayavati to Swamiji's great satisfaction and delight. Outstanding among the results of Swamiji's work in England was the acquisition of the totally dedicated support and sacrifice of Miss Margaret Noble, whom Swamiji initiated into the vows of brahmacharya at Belur Math and gave the name of Nivedita, 'the dedicated'. Her life-long efforts on behalf of the cause of spirituality, women's education, and India as a whole, can never be forgotten.

II

The second phase of Swamiji's work in the West began on 20 June 1899, when he embarked for his second visit to the West. In the meantime the work had been carried on, as we indicated, by Swami Saradananda in America and by Swami Abhedananda in England. The English work, as Swamiji had

foreseen, began to disintegrate when his presence was withdrawn. Eventually Swami Saradananda was recalled to India by Swamiji to become the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and to manage the Indian work of the Order. Swami Abhedananda moved to New York to guide the Vedanta work there. The English work was not revived for several decades.

The American work under Swami Abhedananda's guidance grew. He 'was easily the best known Asian religious teacher in the United States in the (twentieth) century's first two decades.'[22] In addition to leading the Vedanta society of New York, he travelled extensively, and was instrumental in organizing societies for the study and practice of the Vedanta philosophy and religion in other cities, such as Brooklyn, Washington, Pittsburgh, as well as Paris and London. He gave hundreds of lectures and authored many books. A larger hall, able to accommodate the increasing attendance, was rented for the 1898-1899 season. In 1900 an entire house was rented, to be followed in1907 by the purchase of a permanent home.

Swami Abhedananda, in addition to weekly lectures, inaugurated 'regular yoga classes which offered lessons in deep breathing and concentration; he also founded a society library, ...a Saturday morning children's class, where he read and explained Indian fables. And in 1900, a "Young People's Yoga Association" was launched... Most far reaching, he founded a Vedanta press, which made it possible to extend Hinduism's message to every state in the country. By 1906 the total number of books and pamphlets published had reached 50,000,'[23] the larger part of which was made up of the writings of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda. 'The *Vedanta Monthly Bulletin* featured lectures by Swami Abhedananda, articles on Hindu religious subjects, and regular updates on the progress of the Vedanta work in the United States.' Attendance at lectures and classes also increased due to these activities.

Swami Abhedananda was an excellent lecturer, and well informed on many aspects of Western as well as Indian philosophy and science. He tried to show evidence for the close kinship between modern thought and the ancient speculations of Indian sages. He travelled widely, spreading the message of Vedanta wherever he went, and he attracted some of the reputed scholars of the day. He was energetic, enthusiastic, and of a loving disposition, taking great interest in guiding his students on the path of spirituality. A young man,

who was originally from Holland, but living in New York, became his ardent disciple. His name was Cornelius Heyblom. Other young men also gathered around. Swami Abhedananda gave them the vows of brahmacharya, and inspired them to lead lives of purity and renunciation. Much later, in India, Swami Abhedananda gave Cornelius Heyblom, whom he had ordained as Brahmachāri Gurudasa, the vows of sannyāsa and the name Swami Atulananda. This outstanding monk lived on in India until his death there at the age of 96, highly respected in the Ramakrishna Sangha for his deep spirituality and devotion to the monastic ideal.

Swami Abhedananda, well adapted to the western life style, highly gifted both as a speaker and a writer, spread the work far and wide, and enriched Vedantic literature with many books and articles. His complete works run to some ten volumes. Slowly, however, some tensions appeared in the work in New York. Actually these started to surface even as early as 1900, when Swami Vivekananda was still in America. Swamiji, however, declined to interfere in the easing of these tensions, which, moreover, were not even then very clearly stated, and, in fact, remain unclear to this day. These tensions only became exacerbated with time, and led to the resignation of some members of the New York Vedanta Society, as well as financial difficulties, and other troubles, which all eventually led to the temporary suspension of the work of the Society in 1910.[24]

As well as can be established now, the basic trouble, could, from one point of view, be seen as simply a matter of personality and interpretation. The early and extremely successful days featured Swami Abhedananda as the beloved teacher and consultant, a constant source of inspiration and spiritual uplift. Normally a spiritual teacher expects that those early days of nurturing dependence be outgrown, and that the students make a transition to an independent, inner-determined outlook, dependent only on inspiration from the Self within. Perhaps some such thought was behind Swami Abhedananda's increasing emphasis on the spreading of the work abroad, rather than on the nurturing function at the home centre. This led to the increasing disaffection of some of the earlier members. Then when Swami Paramananda, a new assistant swami sent from India, arrived on the scene with a personality that was both affectionate and personable, the old students who had been disaffected, rallied around him and caused an actual open split in the Society. A vote was taken as to which

swami should lead the Society, and, though Swami Abhedananda, who had offered to resign, won the confidence of the majority, he continued to spend much time in Europe and the Society continued to decline. Swami Paramananda, on the other hand, shifted his residence to Boston where he organized a new society which flourished and grew, though eventually, after several decades, problems also surfaced. That Society, which had two centres by that time, disaffiliated itself from the Ramakrishna Order, though its work of teaching has continued successfully to this day. Swami Abhedananda organized a new ashram at a retreat in Connecticut. Eventually, after some ten years, he decided to return to India and, following a sojourn for some time in San Francisco, where he also gathered some students around him, he reached India in 1921.

Though other such problems have appeared on similar occasions in the work in the West, it is the conclusion of one scholar who has extensively studied the work of this Order, that these disagreements have been surprisingly few.[25] The discussion as to whether the Vedanta work in the West should emphasize smaller, more intensive centres to the exclusion of greater effort toward expansion is even today discussed at times by the members of the various centres. Swami Vivekananda, while in the West, seemed to allow each accredited teacher to operate in his or her own way, following whatever course seemed most suitable for the situation at hand, relying on their own assessment of the best method of work. He knew that he had, as he used to say, put the chemicals together, and he was confident that the crystallization would take place in good time in its own way; he was content to just to say 'Arise, awake'. Swami Turiyananda, one of his brother disciples, as we shall see later, also tended to work along somewhat similar lines when he was in charge of the work in California.

Swami Trigunatitananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, on the other hand, as will be elaborated below, had a different approach. He felt that the Vedanta Society was to be viewed as an institute or a school, rather than as a more informal association of individuals with a common interest. Students have come to a school to learn something that they do not know, whereas the teacher has come to teach something that he knows very well. The teacher cannot impart the teaching effectively if the circumstances are not under his control. Especially for spiritual teaching, effective learning requires great discipline on the part of the student in any case, but if one thinks of it as a school

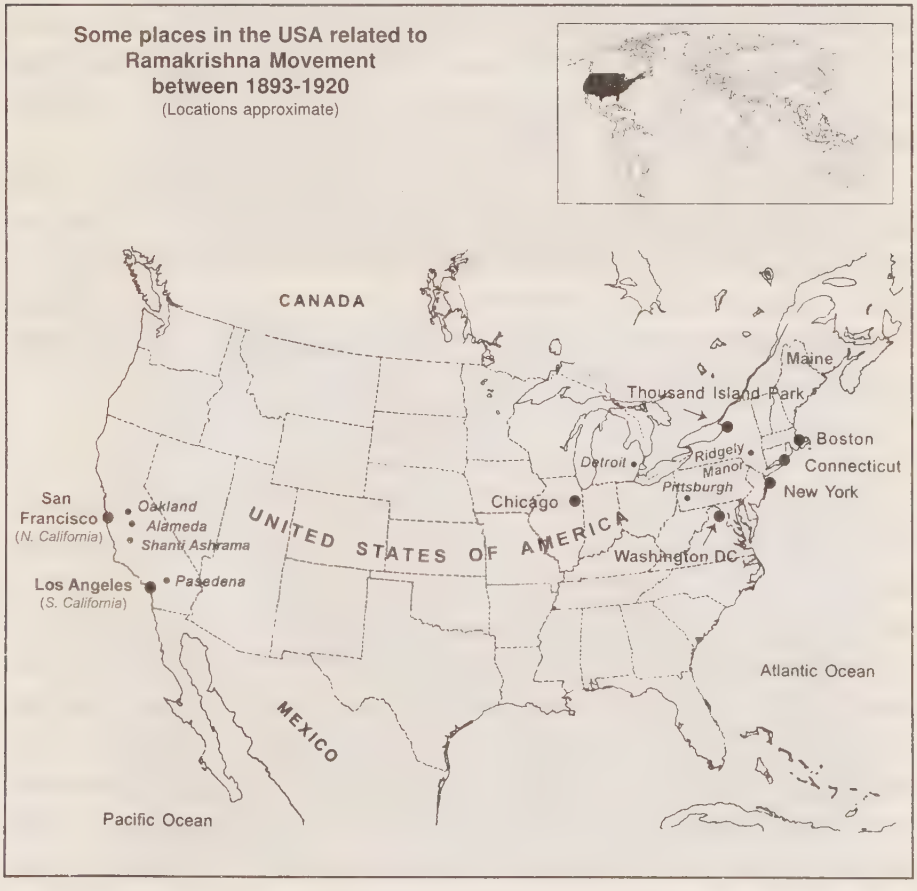
environment, a certain amount of submission to authority is also expected, which is a factor that may arouse opposition from those who see a different relationship.

What has enabled the Ramakrishna Order in the West to be, on the whole, relatively free of major problems of this nature is due to many factors, but chief among these may be cited the proximity in time of the great founders of the movement — Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. Their lives are thrillingly fresh and recent enough in memory to have almost the immediacy of direct experience. Three others of the great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught in the West. The next generation of swamis, whose eyes had been dazzled by the brilliance of the direct disciples, founded most of the present centres. They in turn ignited in their students the fire of pure spirituality and devotion to God that was ablaze in their own hearts. This torch of purity and devotion is now being passed on to the next generation and is the greatest safeguard of the future stability of the movement.

Resuming the narrative of the second phase of Swami Vivekananda's work in the West, we find him landing at London in July of 1899, where, seeing that the English work had collapsed during his stay in India, he soon embarked for America. The ostensible purpose of this second visit to the West was to enable Swamiji to regain his health which had been shattered by overwork in the West and later also by the demands put on him on his return to India. In conformity with this purpose, he spent the next months at a country estate owned by Francis Leggett at Ridgely Manor in upstate New York. There in the congenial company of close disciples and friends, his mind luminous, living in an exalted state of consciousness, he relaxed and gathered strength. The next phase of his teaching life began when he announced to Miss MacLeod, his close follower and friend, who had to go to California for personal business, that if she would get up some classes for him, he would come to California. In time he boarded a transcontinental train for the long journey to Los Angeles. At the same time, Swami Turiyananda, who had come with him from India, stayed on in the New York area, holding classes and inspiring students with his austere, totally God-centred life and loving disposition.

Thus began an expansion of the field of work to the Pacific coast. From December 1899 for the next six months, Swamiji lived and taught first in the Los Angeles area and then in San Francisco. He felt strong enough to again

engage in his previous exhausting round of lectures and classes. He travelled to neighbouring cities also: Pasadena, Oakland, Alameda, Marin County — being everywhere the inspiring lion of Vedanta that was his inner nature. He again issued the Upaniṣadic message of the divinity of all humanity, of the inherent inner perfection of everyone. He described the inspiring lives of the great founders of the world religions, discussed the yogas as the means to spiritual realization, urged an all-inclusive, all accepting universal religion, and crowned it with a call to manifest infinite fortitude and unbending strength in the face of all circumstances — a call to manliness and adamantine strength, based on his sure knowledge of the transience of all phenomena and the ultimate sole reality of the spirit. He was supremely inspiring, a brilliant spiritual light that set hearts and minds aglow.



Two societies were established for the study of Vedanta, one in Southern California and one in San Francisco. As Swamiji was leaving California, he promised that he would send an outstanding monk to San Francisco, one who 'lives Vedanta'; he would send Swami Turiyananda. Thereupon Swamiji returned to the East Coast. When Swamiji returned to New York, he found that a discussion had been going on regarding the desirability of establishing a retreat where those who had been inspired by the teachings of Vedanta could retire and devote themselves wholly and exclusively to the cultivation of the spiritual life. Swamiji was highly supportive of the idea, and a local devotee announced that she had inherited a property of 160 acres in a mountain valley in the San Francisco area, that — though very remote — it might yet be suitable for the establishment of such an ashrama; at least it would serve as a beginning. Swamiji accepted the offer and deputed Swami Turiyananda to go to California and establish an ashrama on that land. Accordingly the Swami entrained for California, and within just a few days of his arrival in San Francisco, set out with a party of eager students for the remote San Antonio Valley to establish what he named 'Shanti Ashrama'.

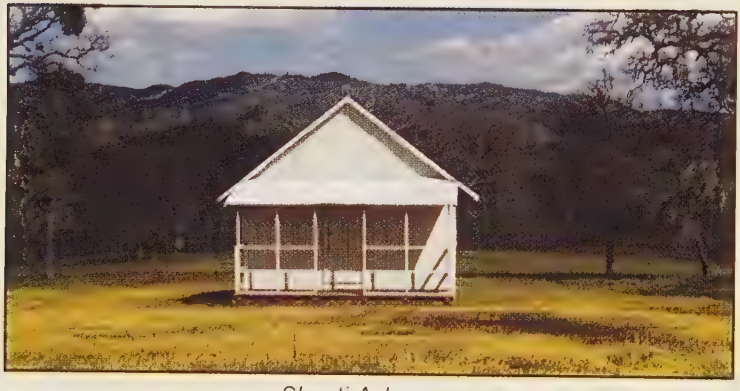
Swami Vivekananda conducted his last classes in New York in June 1900. On 26 July 1900 he embarked for Europe. During his first visit to America he spent nearly 3½ years in the West, and during his second visit he spent 1½ years. After spending some weeks in Paris, Swamiji made a tour of Vienna, Constantinople, Greece, and Cairo, and left for India on 26 November 1900. He reached Belur Math on 9 December 1900.

III

With Swami Vivekananda's departure from the West, there began a new phase in the history of Vedanta Movement in the West. In the remote wilderness, in the west coast — which even now is isolated, the nearest source of supplies being at least thirty miles in every direction, the Shanti Ashrama itself located at least one mile from the nearest road, deep within the surrounding ranch land — Swami Turiyananda led a group of enthusiastic students in their first experience of practical spiritual life. He inspired them with the fire of his spirituality. They organized themselves into a cooperative spiritual community, with a division of tasks and responsibilities — the Swami helping in all works like the others. They quickly built, as their first endeavour, a simple one-room

Swami Turiyananda

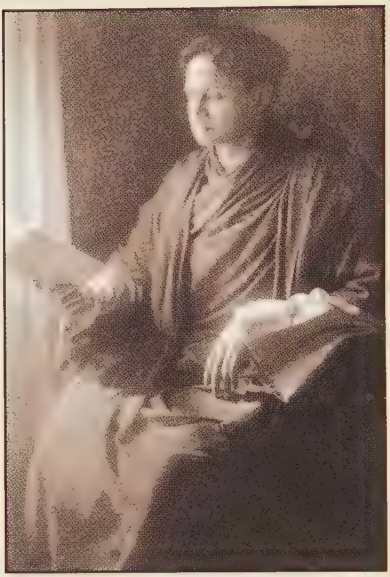
Swami Trigunatitananda



Shanti Ashrama

The Hindu Temple, San Francisco

Swami Abhedananda



Swami Paramananda

Swami Prakashananda

Swami Bodhananda

cabin only 12 feet by 16 feet in size, to serve for their meditation sessions and classes. They studied a variety of subjects, such as some of the works of Swami Vivekananda, as well as standard texts such as the *Vivekachudamani* of Shankaracharya and the *Bhagavad Gita*. The Swami led the work as well as the classes and meditations, and a great and contagious enthusiasm prevailed. There were very few formal rules for the community, yet all ran smoothly under the spell of the Swami's spirituality and love, which bound them all to him and to each other.

Though the Swami spent most of his time at Shanti Ashrama, he also on occasion visited San Francisco and he travelled to Southern California as well, to look after the young society there. In time, however, Swami Turiyananda's health weakened and he was forced to reduce his activities. Due to his weakened condition, he was obliged to spend considerable time in retirement at the Shanti Ashrama in the solitude of his cabin, which stood alone on a low ridge away from the main part of the ashrama. It now became clear to Swami Vivekananda, who was back in India, that the demands of outgoing activity were not suiting Swami Turiyananda's temperament, and were undermining his health. He accordingly arranged for Swami Turiyananda to be sent back to India and be replaced by Swami Trigunatitananda, another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, who arrived in January 1903.

With Swami Trigunatitananda the work in America radically changed its character. It became highly organized and efficient, and the scope of activities widened considerably. In fact the Vedanta Society in San Francisco, under the Swami's dynamic leadership pioneered many of the features, which, though at that time not always successful, have now become standard. These innovations will be described below. The work became highly systematized. Rules were created and customs codified so that all might be able to live amicably together and help the work to flourish. A plot of land was bought and a temple consisting of two floors was built by 1905. For the first time the Society had quarters of its own. Worships were introduced to celebrate the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna and Christ. A printing press was set up, and a magazine, the *Voice of Freedom*, was established. Choirs were organized to provide music at lectures. For some time classes were held for the study of Sanskrit. In addition, some members were trained in giving lectures so that services could be continued even in the absence of the Swami.

The Swami's personality was amazingly energetic and forceful. He did not know what it meant to be tired. Though he later suffered intensely from a number of physical causes, his will of iron prevailed over all his illnesses and he held his body together by sheer determination. From the very beginning he demonstrated dynamic leadership and forged the San Francisco Vedanta Society into a disciplined and highly effective body. He also continued the Society's interest in Shanti Ashrama, but the visits there became highly organized retreats that occurred at most once per year and lasted for one month. A permanent caretaker lived on the property and attended to the needs of students who wanted to spend some days at the ashrama at other times than the official retreat periods. Additional cabins were built to provide ample facilities for the caretaker and the retreatants. Better wells were dug. A windmill was installed to pump water out of the wells into a water storage tank. A distribution system delivered the water to the dining cabin, to bathing facilities at the living quarters, and to a vegetable garden. As much as six acres was at times under cultivation. Cows were kept. A barn was built for the horses and for the carriage and as a storage area for tools and equipment. In short the Shanti Ashrama, in spite of its remoteness, became a fully equipped and functioning establishment. In their month-long retreats, the students, sometimes as many as 37 in number, were able to live in close proximity to the Swami, who worked tirelessly to impart spirituality to them, holding, for instance, three Rāja-Yoga classes and two Gita classes every day, in addition to reading to them from inspiring texts while they ate their meals and in addition to supervising all of their activities.[26]

In 1908 Swami Trigunatitananda conceived the idea to build an additional floor to the monastery and to invite Swami Brahmananda, the President of the Ramakrishna Order, to come to America and take charge of the work, using the new top floor of the temple as his living quarters. Accordingly he had an elaborately ornate apartment built, along with a set of four unique oriental towers and one classic western style tower — these towers from different traditions representing a unifying spiritual outlook. Since Swami Brahmananda did not agree to come, Swami Trigunatitananda decided that, in order to utilize the new quarters appropriately, he would establish a monastery and house its members in the new quarters. Very soon a number of men joined and the monastery became a functioning unit.

In the same way, the Swami decided to found a convent for women who felt the call to the monastic life. This was established in a house across the street from the temple. All these units of the Society, monastics and householders, were bound together by Swami Trigunatitananda's unifying and disciplining inspiration. Strict rules were drawn up and enforced and everything ran like clockwork.

Another innovation the Swami first introduced in 1911was the establishment of a model community on a large plot of agricultural land across San Francisco Bay about one and a half hours by ferry and automobile from the temple. The conceptual plan called for the Society to purchase the land and build a temple with attached library. There were also ideas of developing a home for aged devotees of the Society who were in want or no longer able to take care of themselves. There was a plan of building a hospital with both indoors and outdoors sections, 'so that patients might have a full chance of recovery in the pleasant surroundings, beautiful scenery and climate.'[27] Devotees of the Society were to purchase lots on that land and build houses for themselves, thus forming a community of devotees there. A portion of the monastery brotherhood would be established there to work the land and develop it. The land was said to be especially suitable for growing walnuts, and this was to be a source of income to pay off the loan incurred in the purchase of the land, as well as to be a source of income later. Though these ambitious plans did not fully come to fruition and though eventually the project had to be abandoned, a serious start was made in this pioneering effort. Some houses were built and some devotees moved there; the land was cultivated; the Swami regularly went to the property to bring supplies and supervise operations. Some 200 acres had been purchased, of which 25 acres were reserved for the support of the Society.

Swami Trigunatitananda, in this way, established the Vedanta Society in San Francisco on a secure foundation by his total dedication, complete self-sacrifice and far-sighted innovations, by training up a small number of utterly dedicated and totally committed devotees and setting them firmly on the steep path of single-minded devotion to Sri Ramakrishna and his work.

The Order sent Swami Prakashananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, from India in 1906 to assist Swami Trigunatitananda. This new Swami fully participated in all the varied activities of the Society, relieving Swami Triguna-

titananda of numerous tasks. He gave many of the lectures, of which there were three every Sunday, held classes, wrote many of the articles of the magazine, cooked all of the meals for the monastery, and took his share of the routine tasks of cleaning. He worked exceedingly hard for many years and was much beloved by the members. In 1914, however, he felt no longer able to sustain this pace of work. He wished to settle in another city and organize his own centre there. Swami Trigunatitananda, who would again have to shoulder the full burden of all the work, was, however, very grateful for Swami Prakashananda's devoted assistance for the past eight years and raised from the devotees a sum of money to help him settle in his new endeavour. Swami Prakashananda tried to establish a centre in the state of Washington, but he returned to San Francisco in June of 1914 to establish a new centre, called the Pacific Vedanta Centre, not very far from the Vedanta Society's temple.[28]

Swami Trigunatitananda once more resumed the full load of his work. One is astounded on reading the record of those days how anyone could bear such an intense load of work year after year. He gave every ounce of his strength to finding new and imaginative ways to impel toward God realization those dedicated souls that put themselves under his care. With incredible clarity of insight he could see what would be beneficial and what would be detrimental for the spiritual welfare of his students. He demanded of them, as well as of himself, the total sacrifice of everything — body, mind, and soul — at the feet of God. And he himself was literally to give his all when, three days after Christmas of 1914, one of the known devotees, apparently mentally unbalanced, exploded a bomb in the temple auditorium, killing himself, and severely injuring the Swami and several devotees. The Swami was all forgiveness and concern for the miserable mental state of this man that impelled him to such a deed.[29] Then on 10 January 1915, after some initial improvement, blood poisoning set in and Swami Trigunatitananda succumbed to it. For at least three years previous, however, the Swami had been declaring that he was holding the body together only by force of will, because of the many other serious ailments that had been afflicting him for a long time.

The Order then requested Swami Prakashananda to assume leadership of the Society, which he did in December 1915, closing his new centre and reuniting its membership with the Vedanta Society. In the meantime, Swami Trigunatitananda's students kept the Society's activities going by officiating

themselves. Swami Prakashananda was a gentle and loving soul and the work went on smoothly. The Swami, however, passed away in 1927.

In New York, Swami Bodhananda, another disciple of Swami Vivekananda, assumed charge after Swami Abhedananda and Swami Paramananda had left. He carried on the work with great steadfastness for many decades.

One could say that the great pioneering period that established the western work of the Ramakrishna Movement and set its future trends was completed by the time that Swami Trigunatitananda passed away. The basic pattern and its major variations had been set. Swami Vivekananda, having experimented with several modes of presentation, settled on the pattern of smaller classes for intensive instruction to small, dedicated groups along with larger public lectures to reach a wider audience, a system that combines an effort to spread the message with the practical training to make it effective in life. He also emphasized a programme of publication for further outreach. He encouraged the establishment of ashramas where serious students could go for periods of intensive spiritual practice in a secluded place, under the close guidance of a spiritual teacher. He started the practice of giving spiritual initiation to intensify the students' spiritual practices. He travelled far and wide spreading the ideas and encouraging associations for mutual enlightenment and support.

Swami Abhedananda added an outreach to the academic community as well as a strong conviction that these teachings must be spread as widely as possible. Swami Turiyananda focused on the development of the ashrama community with its intense commitment toward the attainment of spiritual depth in this very life. Swami Trigunatitananda developed the concept of the urban centre to its farthest limits, along with all possible auxiliary methods and new departures to help spiritualize one's life.

The overall effort, however, has always encouraged diving deep into one's self to find the spiritual reality within, rather than a more outgoing effort of involving oneself in social action. Parallel to this has been the general tendency away from a more public stance. In consequence, the number of students of Vedanta has always been small, but dedicated to an intense spiritual life. The influence of the Ramakrishna Movement, in spite of its small size and low profile, is far greater than its mere numbers would indicate. The Order is widely recognized in academic circles as well as in more popular arenas as an authentic and reliable voice for the ancient and nowadays widely appreciated teachings

of Hinduism. It is recognized that the Order's teaching has been kept pure and authentic.

The basic universal truths emphasized by Hinduism have been popularized by many other spiritual organizations that have come to the West since Swami Vivekananda's heroic efforts to open the minds of western people to the wisdom of the East. These truths have been consciously or unconsciously absorbed into much of western thought, giving it a universality of outlook and a generosity of spirit that were rare before. Though not so obvious from a cursory and more superficial look, it is nevertheless true that the West is now a far different place than what it was before this infusion of eastern thought.

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[3] Ibid., p. 172.

[4] Ibid., p. 465.

[5] Ibid., p. 273.

[6] Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 88.

[7] Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 92.

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[9] MLB, Vol. 2, p.353.

[10] *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.7, p. 93. Hereafter *Complete Works*.

[11] *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, p.106.

[12] MLB, Vol. 3, p. 141.

[13] Ibid., p. 282.

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[23] VFTW, p. 53.

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[26] *Swami Turiyananda*, p. 154.

[27] Sister Gargi, *Swami Trigunatita — His Life and Work*, p. 274.

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Ramakrishna Movement in America
THE MIDDLE PHASE (1920-1970)

PRAVRAJIKA BRAHMAPRANA

'THERE IS NO EASY WAY to have come to a land that knew little of India's spirituality....' Dr. Huston Smith said in his eulogy to his teacher Swami Satprakashananda in the small chapel at the Vedanta Society of St. Louis. Dr. Smith, former president of the Society, continued, 'and leave it having brought students well along the path and having changed the lives of hundreds. There is no easy way to have founded and nurtured in America's heartland a centre which, though in fact universal, bore a name that to passers-by seemed foreign. He brought us Vedanta, himself, and a Truth in which we are included.'[1]

Dr. Smith could have been describing any one of the pioneer swamis who had come to America from 1920 until 1970 — whose work transformed the lives of hundreds of Americans and, in so doing, moved Vedanta away from the exclusive philosophy of the Hindus towards a philosophy that belongs to the world. Who were these pioneer swamis? What did they possess that attracted numerous prominent Americans — intellectuals, artists, scientists, socialites, Christian clergymen, and rabbis? Dr. Huston Smith, a celebrated religious historian, through his standard college text *The Religions of Man*,[2] was one of the many influential Americans who publicized and supported Vedanta in America.

What was the secret of the pioneer swamis' success? How did they endure racial and religious bigotry to then buy land and build centres in times of financial uncertainty? In a Judeo-Christian country, how could these swamis

without proselytizing begin to draw Americans into their congregations, monasteries, and convents? How did they build a large body of Ramakrishna-Vedanta literature which entered homes, bookstores, libraries, and classrooms throughout America?

The answer to these questions is what some of us find so fascinating about the early history of the Ramakrishna Movement in America — an answer inscribed in a rich oral and written tradition.

In 1923, shortly before Swami Prabhavananda left for America at the request of the trustees of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Ramakrishna, said to him: 'So you are going to cross seven oceans and thirteen rivers.' 'Yes, Maharaj', the twenty-nine-year-old Swami replied, 'you are sending me. But I feel nervous. What do I know that I can teach or preach?' Swami Saradananda replied in English. Swami Prabhavananda used to relate, 'His words are still ringing in my ears: "That is none of your business! We shall see to that!"' 'And' the Swami used to add, 'they have seen to it!'[3]

Swami Nikhilananda, founder of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York, was also blessed by a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Shivananda, who slapped him on the back with the prophetic remark: 'Wherever you go, you will be victorious!'[4]

These pioneer swamis would at times openly emphasize that the secret of their success lay in the fact that they were only 'second-in-command', that the unseen hand of God was guiding the Vedanta work in America. A disciple of Swami Brahmananda[5] related:

> When I first came to America, I had a dream. Swami Vivekananda came to me. He put his hands on my shoulders, pressed on them, and said, 'I want to see if you can carry my weight.' Earlier, in Madras, Swami Brahmananda had told the Swami, 'Sri Ramakrishna does his own preaching. Be the witness.'[6]

By 1921, when the last of the five direct disciples who had come to America — Swamis Vivekananda, Turiyananda, Saradananda, Trigunatitananda, and Abhedananda — had died or left, Vedanta centres had been founded in three cities: New York (1894), San Francisco (1900), and Boston (1909), with growing pockets of interest throughout the country. During the next fifty years, the Vedanta work in America would witness the arrival of thirty swamis

sent by the trustees of the Ramakrishna Order — some of whom, after serving as assistants, returned to India. Twenty second-generation swamis[7] remained to head or found new centres. They were the pioneer swamis.

By 1970 their accomplishments had grown from three to fourteen official centres (including branches), the eleven new centres having been founded in Portland (1925), Providence (1928), Hollywood (1929), Chicago (1930), New York (east side, 1933), Seattle (1938), St. Louis (1938), Olema (1946), Santa Barbara (1947), Trabuco (1949), Berkeley (1966), and Sacramento (1966).

The Ramakrishna Movement in America witnessed the acquisition of two historical landmarks: the Vivekananda Cottage at Thousand Island Park, New York (1947), and the Vivekananda House in Pasadena, California (1955). Also, besides the retreat at Shanti Ashrama, established in 1900, five other large retreats at Lake Tahoe, California (1937), Olema, California (1946), Marshfield, Massachusetts (1946), Scappoose, Oregon (1936), and Ganges, Michigan (1969) were founded.

Toil and hardships accompanied the swamis' successes in America. In order to avoid anti-racial encounters, by the 1930s most of the pioneer swamis adopted as streetwear the clerical collar, a practice initiated by Swami Bodhananda in New York. During the 1930s and 1940s, several newspapers refused to print Swami Satprakashananda's advertisements for lectures and classes.[8] The swami would sometimes receive 'taunting' phone calls in the middle of the night[9] or vulgar letters, 'particularly', he pointed out, 'following lectures on karma and reincarnation'.[10] As late as the 1950s, after racial and religious prejudice sabotaged two attempts to buy a centre in St. Louis, the Swami had no recourse but to request Dr. Huston Smith to purchase it in his own name — which he did, to later turn it over to the Vedanta Society.[11]

Even in the North during the late 1930s, Swami Paramananda suffered prejudice at the hands of the Irish-Catholic bureaucracy, who refused to recognize the Boston Vedanta centre as a genuine religious institution entitled to tax-exempt status. When the centre's taxes far exceeded its income, Swami Paramananda underwent a two-year legal battle. Though the outcome was successful, the Swami, when summoned to court, endured the indignities of the cross-examiner: 'What do you worship? The sun? The moon? The stars?' Swami Paramananda remained silent. One onlooker commented: 'He was like Christ before Pilate.'[12]

Paucity of members and money were other austerities the pioneer swamis endured. In the 1930s, after Sister Lalita, Mrs. Carrie Wyckoff, invited Swami Prabhavananda to her Hollywood home, the future Vedanta Society of Southern California, the Swami soon discovered that sincere spiritual seekers were few and far between. He was forced to stop lecturing in rented halls, which largely attracted mystery-mongers and seekers of eternal youth, and held his lectures and classes in Sister Lalita's home. 'Many a time the Swami would stand and lecture for his full hour before a mere handful of people scattered among the empty seats', Sister Amiya, one of the earliest residents of the Society, wrote.

> This small attendance meant also a small income, for the maintenance of the Swami and the Home was dependent upon the voluntary contributions of friends, supplemented for a short time by the Sister's [Sister Lalita's] small income. This useful supplement was stopped in 1932, leaving nothing for them to live on but the generosity of the public.

'Such a situation, however, could not daunt the Swami's spirit', Amiya continued. 'Out of the small savings which the Sister had given him, he had a shrine room built on to the Home.'[13]

Some of the entries in Swami Gnaneswarananda's old account book revealed that his Great Depression years in Chicago were just as austere as those for Swami Prabhavananda in Hollywood. 'Against car-fare of 20 cents, Swami's food was only 15 cents', Mallika Gupta recorded in her book, *Swami Gnaneswarananda*.

> The sale of books on Sunday was $5.00 while the hall rent was $10.00. Many times funds were almost at the vanishing point. One of the older students told us that once there was nothing to eat in the house except some lettuce and a little bread.[14]

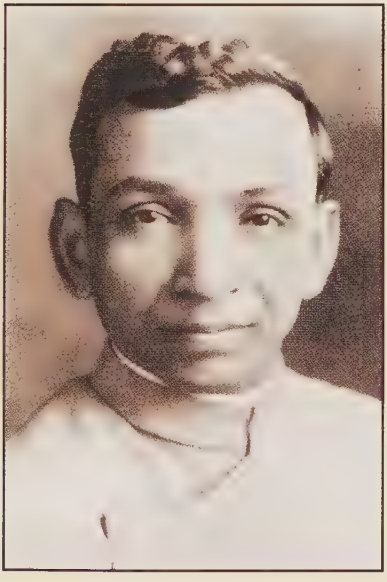
Though some of Swami Gnaneswarananda's 'well-wishers' urged him to lecture in the parlours of the wealthy, the Swami refused to encourage exclusiveness. Instead he preferred to give public lectures that were advertised in the newspapers as open to all.[15]

In spite of dire financial straits, the pioneer swamis refused to ask for money from their parishioners. They well understood the disillusionment of many former Christians and Jews who had grown wary of the 'business' of religion in America. Furthermore, the swamis remained uncompromising in their conviction that if the Vedanta work in America were the Lord's work, He would provide the money. And provide He did. A disciple of Swami Vividishananda, the founder of the Seattle centre, related:

> The largest donation that the Society received during Swami Vividishananda's time was $2,000. He used to say that for twenty years the Society was on a financial tight-rope. The monthly bills had to be paid — but from where? Just at that time, a lady who had been attending several Sunday lectures asked to have an interview with the Swami. After the interview, she handed Swami Vividishananda an envelope and said that it was a small donation for the Society. When Swami later opened it, he found $2,000 in cash, whereupon he contacted the lady to inquire if she was sure about giving such a large sum of money. (In those days — the 1940s — $2,000 was a large sum. For example, the 6,000 square-foot Vedanta Society building

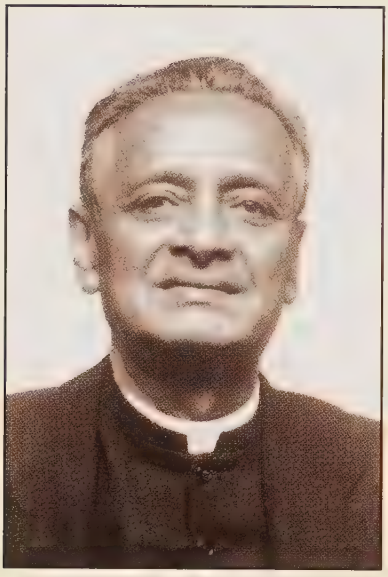
Swami Satprakashananda

Swami Prabhavananda

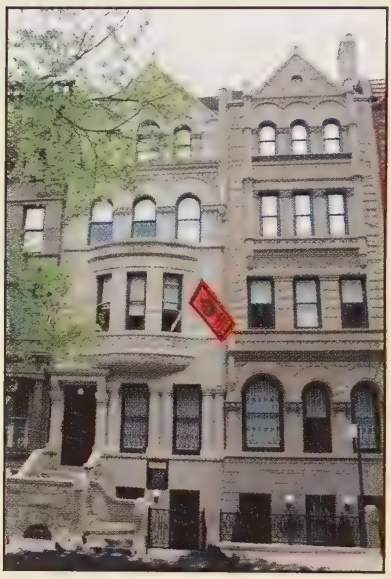


Swami Vividishananda

Swami Akhilananda



Swami Nikhilananda



Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre, New York

Swami Ashokananda

Swami Gnaneswarananda

Swami Vishwananda

was purchased in 1942, for $8,000.) She assured him that it was not given as a result of momentary emotion and had no strings attached to it.[16]

Not only does the oral tradition of the Ramakrishna Movement in America reveal how money was sometimes provided, but also the inscrutable ways in which some members were drawn to the Vedanta centres. A longtime Vedanta member — now deceased — once divulged how she came into Vedanta:

> She was a Sioux Indian and a grandniece of Crazy Horse. In 1936, she and her husband were living near Denver, Colorado. They were searching for a religion and philosophy, but nothing seemed to be right. One night Mrs. Harrison had a vision of three tepees — a large one in the centre with smaller ones on each side. The large one in the centre had on it the word HINDUISM in glowing letters. The next morning, as they were reading the religion section of the newspaper, they came across the Vedanta Society's advertisement. Swami Vividishananda was in Denver at that time.[17]

When the Swami went to Seattle in 1938, Mr. and Mrs. Harrison moved there also and became life-long devotees of Sri Ramakrishna.

Emissaries of an alien religion in a Judeo-Christian land, the pioneer swamis often attracted the admiration and reverence of conservative Americans, who were sometimes reticent to publicly align themselves with anything 'unAmerican'. This dilemma understandably stymied the initial growth rate of the Ramakrishna Movement in America; but it also produced some humorous incidents. Swami Satprakashananda remembered how an oil financier, who had become devoted to him during the early days, one day volunteered to be his driver. During one of his drives, the financier blurted out: 'Swami, you are a saint. I love you! I love you! You are a saint.' 'Well', the Swami responded gently, 'if you think I am a saint, can't you help me build my Vedanta work?' 'Oh no, Swami!' was his reply. 'I am an Episcopalian. I cannot help you!' To which the Swami replied with a smile, 'I did not know that an Episcopalian could not help a saint!'[18]

The pioneer swamis were well matched for the challenges they faced. They did not measure the Ramakrishna Movement's success in terms of mass conversions, huge bank accounts, or grand buildings, but in the quiet building of lives. 'If the movement has real life in it', Swami Saradananda, the General-

Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, stated in his opening address at the 1926 Convention, 'and it is based on essential truths governing human nature and its various functions and activities, it will survive, grow, and drive its roots gradually into men's hearts, in spite of...opposition. This opposition from outside helps the movement to concentrate its energies and bring into expression and life the fundamental truth on which it stands.'[19]

Swami Vivekananda had initially set the tone and pace for the Ramakrishna Movement in America when he had stated:

> I propound a philosophy which can serve as a basis to every possible religious system in the world, and my attitude toward all of them is one of extreme sympathy — my teaching is antagonistic to none.[20]

The second-generation swamis who followed in Vivekananda's footsteps tried to execute the literal meaning of these words, even if it meant turning inquiring Christians back to their own churches, as Swamis Prabhavananda, Akhilananda, Satprakashananda, and others reportedly did. To a member of a prominent church in St. Louis, Swami Satprakashananda explained:

> We seek no converts. We want to see that our students and members strive after spiritual living, regardless of what they call themselves — Christians, Vedantists, Jews, or Hindus.... Our work is intended to make a Christian a better Christian, a Jew a better Jew, a Mohammedan a better Mohammedan, a Hindu a better Hindu.[21]

Phyllis Jacobsmeyer, a member of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, recalled two people — 'and no doubt there were others', she asserted — whom Swami Satprakashananda encouraged to return to their Christian roots. 'They had been coming to lectures for many months', she explained, 'but the Swami had great insight and knew what was best for them. Years later, both of these people told me how grateful they were to him for his advice, as well as how much they had learned attending his lectures.'[22]

In his meditation instructions to Catholic-raised Vedantists, Swami Akhilananda would often suggest Jesus or the Madonna as the Chosen Ideal for their meditation.[23] 'In general, the swamis have approached Christianity with sympathy and appreciation',[24] Dr. Carl Jackson affirmed in his book *Vedanta for the West*; 'but not', he added, 'Christianity's most serious shortcomings',

which were, according to the swamis, 'its claim to exclusive truth, aggressive missionary style, frequently expressed contempt for other religions, and undue emphasis on miracles rather than reason.' 'Without exception', Dr. Jackson added, 'these failings were attributed, not to its founder, but to the church that had violated his teachings.'[25]

In describing his future missionaries, Swami Vivekananda had prophesied that they would be of two types:

> Those who moved like wildfire, spreading...their news, and those who dug deep into the soil of one place, putting down roots and shedding fragrance on those in their shade.[26]

Swami Paramananda belonged to both classes. In the 1920s with the dawn of the age of psychology in America, the Swami was invited to address numerous psychology conventions and clubs throughout the country. During a twelve-day tour in November 1921, he reportedly delivered twenty-two lectures in seven cities, selling 1,800 of his books and pamphlets in the process.[27] Sometimes he criss-crossed the country delivering lectures in Los Angeles, Seattle, Louisville, Buffalo, Philadelphia, New York, Cincinnati, and other cities to audiences numbering between 500 and 1,200.[28] Usually, however, after conducting his Sunday service at the Boston centre, the Swami would leave for lecture engagements in New York and Ohio, returning to Boston in time for the next Sunday's services. By 1921, the public attendance of his Sunday services at the Vedanta centre on Queensbury Street had swelled to between 130 and 160, forcing the residents of the centre to make extensive additions to the twenty-room house.[29]

Swami Paramananda, like several other gifted pioneer swamis, could feel the pulse of his audiences. Americans were not interested in hearing about Vedanta as an abstract truth, but as a method of transcending and solving everyday problems — how to find peace, assuage grief, improve human relationships with family, friends, and fellow workers. 'Religion is not found in theory', Paramananda explained at one time, 'rather it is in our practical life that we find it. This has been the dominant thought in every word that I have spoken from the public platform, in intimate talks, and in all my written books.'[30]

However, Swami Paramananda could not withstand the physical demands of both lecture tours and administering to his two centres and their ever-growing

circle of friends, devotees, ashramites, and members of a brotherhood and sisterhood. Nor could he sustain the necessary balance of attention between these two fields of operation. By the mid-1920s, after the acquisition of his large retreat acreage at Ananda Ashrama on the West Coast, where the Swami established a Temple of the Universal Spirit and a farm community, he was committed to travelling between both coasts at gruelling two or three-week intervals,[31] accepting outside lecture engagements en route. Inevitably the Swami's prolonged absences from both centres allowed factions to fester and attendance at public services to diminish. The audiences at Ananda Ashrama remained meagre for the rest of Swami Paramananda's life. However, later in the mid-1930s, due to an increase of resident workers and the Swami's delegation of responsibility, the Boston centre was able to regain its vitality.[32]

When Swamis Vividishananda and Satprakashananda first came to America, they also travelled independently around the country seeking the crowds that Swami Vivekananda had attracted, but unlike Swami Paramananda, they both met with disappointment. Swami Satprakashananda finally visited Swami Bodhananda in New York — the senior-most Swami in America — to ask his advice about starting a centre in St. Louis. 'Go there and bite the earth!' was the reply.[33]

Swamis Gnaneswarananda and Nikhilananda were two of the pioneer Swamis who 'bit the earth' and through their charisma as public speakers immediately attracted large audiences. During his first six months as head of the Chicago centre, Swami Gnaneswarananda saw his Sunday congregations grow from sixty to ninety people and his evening classes swell from fifty to seventy. Six years later, in 1936, *The Census of Religious Bodies* reported that the Society's membership was 106, one of the largest centres outside of India.[34] On special occasions, a rented hall with a seating capacity of 500 would be filled — not only to hear the Swami speak, but also to listen to an Indian music concert performed by Vedanta students whom the Swami had personally trained, or to partake in a banquet of gourmet Indian dishes.

Swami Gnaneswarananda attracted audiences as much by his dynamism as by his love. Quick to pick up American idiomatic expressions, he would then insert them in his lectures. The Swami would refer to the battlefield of Kurukshetra as 'life's Broadway of action'. To illustrate how to overcome pride, he would counsel: 'You say you can't get rid of pride? Then be proud, I

say. Develop a *sky-scraping pride*.'[35] Knowing how difficult it was for Westerners to pronounce tongue-twisting Sanskrit words, Swami Gnaneswarananda would accommodate them with his characteristic humour, signing letters to intimate disciples 'Joe Bliss'.[36]

Swami Nikhilananda also loved America, and America loved him. During his forty-year tenure in New York, the Swami gained a reputation as a dynamic speaker and brilliant conversationalist. In beautiful spoken English and with a facile wit, the Swami quickly connected with his American audiences. Well versed in many subjects, he also impressed his audiences by the ease with which he could draw analogies from American history and culture in order to illustrate a point.[37] It was no wonder that in the early 1930s Nikhilananda's Sunday services were attracting 100-150 people.[38]

Though Swami Nikhilananda's monastery always remained small — unwilling as he was to either start an ashrama or gather a large group of people around him[39] — the Swami 'quickly became a familiar figure on the New York intellectual scene', according to historian Carl Jackson, 'regularly accepting invitations to address such disparate groups as the Indian Academy of America, Roerich Society, Hindustan Association, Fellowship of Faiths, All Souls' Unitarian Church, and St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia University.'[40]

Swami Nikhilananda 'not only reached out to Westerners', Jackson noted, 'but also cultivated close ties with the Asian Indian community in the New York metropolitan area at a time when Indian nationals played almost no role in the Vedanta Societies.'[41]

Unlike Swami Nikhilananda, Swami Ashokananda, head of the Vedanta Society in San Francisco, focused all his energies within the Society. Through his natural gifts as a public speaker and administrator, he transformed the centre into one of the Ramakrishna Movement's largest and most dynamic centres in America. Crowds gathered to hear his two-hour discourses. 'The majestic bearing', Swami Yogeshananda, former resident of the centre, reminisced, 'the musical and resounding voice, the lion-like pacing as he elaborated a point, the use of his hands — all went to compose the drama. Just when things were becoming intense there might come a sudden pause — a joke, a tangential story or an abject confession — something to let everyone breathe once more.... He always ended on a monistic note.'[42]

By 1965, the average Sunday morning attendance had risen to 275 people.[43] But that was not all. 'Two new ashramas were added to the retreat already existing at Shanti Ashrama', Dr. Carl Jackson, the historian, noted in reference to the San Francisco work, 'monasteries were opened at Olema and in San Franciso;[44] and when the main Hindu Temple could no longer handle the expanding audience that crowded the society's services, a large temple was erected. Meanwhile, branch centers were inaugurated in Sacramento and Berkeley.'[45]

Like Swami Ashokananda in northern California, Swami Prabhavananda amassed a Vedanta empire in southern California. A powerful speaker, the Swami attracted ever growing audiences, reaching in the 1960s to Sunday services of more than 350 people.[46] Under his administration the Hollywood Centre acquired two branch centres in Santa Barbara and Trabuco, the Vivekananda House in Pasadena, temples in Hollywood and Santa Barbara, a monastery at three locations, and a convent at two.

When Swami Ashokananda tried to convince Swami Nikhilananda to build a temple, his brother-monk replied that he could either build a temple or write books. Later Swami Nikhilananda translated *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, after which Holy Mother[47] appeared to him in a dream and said: 'You have done this for the Master and you have not done anything for me?'[48] The Swami, who was Holy Mother's disciple, then wrote her biography.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, the Vedanta work was still small enough that Swamis Paramananda, Prabhavananda, Nikhilananda, Akhilananda, and Satprakashananda could devote much of their time to writing an impressive array of biographies, scriptural translations, philosophic texts, and practical spiritual guides. Their books, often edited by celebrated Western authors and published by renowned firms — sometimes as mass market editions — appeared in college syllabuses and on the shelves of bookstores and libraries throughout the country. 'No recent movement in the Indian religious tradition', wrote historian Harold W. French in his book *The Swan's Wide Waters*, 'has exhibited the intellectual virility of the Ramakrishna Movement.'[49]

In addition to *The Message of the East*, founded in 1912 by Swami Paramananda, the Vedanta literary movement was augmented in 1938 by another journal, *The Voice of India*, co-founded by Swamis Prabhavananda

and Ashokananda. After two years it was renamed *Vedanta and the West* and was published solely by the Hollywood centre, soon gaining a reputation for hosting articles by the early swamis and their followers — some of them well-known American names.

This was a momentous time in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement, when the names of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were becoming known in America's intellectual circles. Miss Josephine MacLeod, herself a lady missionary whose contacts with prominent Westerners did much to introduce Vedanta to American society during the first half of the twentieth century, celebrated each victory. In a December 7, 1939 letter she wrote:

> Swami Nikhilananda just called me up to say that a new friend is giving 3,500 dollars to publish his and Margaret Wilson's translation of Sri Ramakrishna's gospel on which they have worked four years. So you see, what touches the heart warms it to activity.

Later that month, she wrote:

> The Chicago Swami [Swami Vishwananda] sent me a card saying the new 'World Bible' just issued of 1,400 pages, begins with six sentences of Ramakrishna![50]

By the 1940s and 1950s, through the spiritual esteem for the pioneer swamis,[51] their literary works, and the ever-widening circle of intellectuals, scientists, and artists they attracted, Vedanta began to grow in America's estimation as a spiritually sound philosophy.

In the late 1930s Gerald Heard, after discovering Swami Prabhavananda at the Vedanta Society of Southern California, brought Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood to the Hollywood centre. Through their writings and lectures they popularized the 'Perennial Philosophy'. Notable scientists such as Dr. Joseph Kaplan, physicist and at one time Chairman of the National Geophysical Year, also gave credence to Vedanta by such public statements as 'Vedanta illuminates science!'[52] Other literary figures who visited the Swami included Henry Miller, Somerset Maugham, John Van Druten, and Tennessee Williams.[53]

Even after a brief visit with Swami Prabhavananda, Henry Miller was moved to comment in his book *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*: 'The most

masterful individual, the only person I met whom I could truly call "a great soul", was a quiet Hindu Swami in Hollywood.'[54] And of Swami Vivekananda, 'I am coming back to him later', Miller wrote in one of several references to him in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, 'to his clean, powerful words spoken like a fearless champion not of India but of the human race.'[55]

Somerset Maugham, who was preparing the screenplay for *The Razor's Edge*, met with Swami Prabhavananda four times, accompanied on occasion by George Cukor (director), Tyrone Power (as Larry), and Clifton Webb (as Elliott Templeton). At more than one of these meetings, Swami Vidyatmananda recalled in his article, '*The Razor's Edge*: Twenty-One Years Later', that Maugham discussed Vedanta with the Swami: He told the Swami that he really accepted Advaita Vedanta; but he felt he was too old to himself commence the practice of religion.[56] Swami Vidyatmananda further recounted:

> The Swami naturally found it hard to visualize Tyrone Power being able to play a realized soul. Standing with his back to the fireplace, talking to the Swami, Power commenced to discuss his conception of how he planned to convey Maugham's hero. The Swami responded in unconcealed disbelief: 'And you think you can play Larry!' Power sat down with a thump at this candid questioning of his ability to depict a man of illumination. But the two talked about the matter, and as a result Power studied the role and its religious implications with care, in an attempt to give as authentic a portrayal as he was capable of giving.[57]

At the same time that Swami Prabhavananda could count among his disciples and acquaintances some of the big names in the Hollywood film industry, on the East Coast Swami Nikhilananda was also attracting many notables. Among those were J. D. Salinger (author), Joseph Campbell (mythologist), Chester Carlson (inventor of Xerox), Mrs. Max Beckmann (wife of the famous artist), Miss Margaret Woodrow Wilson (daughter of the United States President), and Malvina Hoffman (sculptress). Inevitably at the public functions which Swami Nikhilananda hosted, distinguished guests were listed on the programme. Swami Atmaghanananda, one of the resident American swamis at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, reported:

> The Swami Vivekananda Centenary Dinner held last Thursday [1963] exceeded all our expectations. U Thant was marvellous. He was thoroughly familiar with the [Ramakrishna] Mission's work in Burma and had evidently read a lot of Swamiji's [Swami Vivekananda's] life. He called him one of the greatest men of all time and said that what he had preached about religious 'tolerance' must now be applied to the political sphere. He also said that Swamiji taught the very difficult matter of getting to know who you are in the simplest possible terms.

Swami Atmaghanananda further recounted:

> Vincent Sheean was very lively and said among other things that Swamiji acted with what must be one of the greatest examples in religious history, in not mentioning his teacher for two years during his speeches in this country.... Also there were messages from...Dr. Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Nehru.[58]

Swami Akhilananda at the Boston and Providence centre was also making contacts with some of America's leading intellectuals through his affiliations with about twenty-five different organizations — intellectual, philosophical, scientific, psychological, theological, and inter-religious — which facilitated encounters with such distinguished acquaintances as Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington[59] and Erich Fromm.[60] 'Among other individuals', Dr. Carl Jackson observed, 'he established friendships with Edgar S. Brightman, Pitirim Sorokin, Gordon Allport, Harlow Shapley, Walter Houston Clark, and F.S.S. Northrop — all figures of national prominence in their fields.'[61]

The Vedanta work in America was ripe for the 1960s ferment in religions. From the college-born anti-Vietnam war movement evolved a national revolution that ultimately challenged not only America's political authority, but other forms of domination — whether parental, vocational, or religious. Unquestioned do's and don'ts that had failed the test of justice, reason, and science were publicly decried and discarded. America underwent a soul-searching identity crisis, whose idealism reached beyond national borders for a philosophy of life that embraced peace, harmony, righteous living (dharma), and non-violence (ahimsa). The West turned to the East.

However, by the time the Vatican issued *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, officially sanctioning 'dialogue and collaboration with other religions', the Church's previous separatist dogmas had already set in motion a great church exodus. By 1968, one-half to two-thirds of the monastics in every Catholic monastery and convent in the land had left their Orders. Sixty-seven percent of America's Judeo-Christian congregations had also abandoned their houses of worship.[62] To counteract this trend, nationwide Commissions on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs were founded, funded by the Church Archdioceses, as well as other interfaith organizations and councils to which the Vedanta swamis and their American monastics were invited to participate as official representatives of Hinduism.

Why was Vedanta given such immediate status? With the advent of the Chicago Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda became recognized as the 'pioneer of East-West dialogue';[63] and Vedanta, through the painstaking efforts of the second generation swamis, became known as 'the high Church of Hinduism'.[64] Through the swamis' literary outreach and contact with America's clergy and intellectuals, researchers would come to acknowledge the Vedanta Societies as comprising 'the oldest and most influential Hindu organization in the United States'.[65]

As early as the 1920s and 1930s, pioneer swamis such as Paramananda, Gnaneswarananda, Akhilananda, and Nikhilananda had been speaking before university groups, cultural societies, and religious associations.[66] Even in the Deep South, educational institutions and churches of different denominations used to bring their classes to Vedanta centres to hear talks by the swamis.[67] With the advent of the 1960s these engagements multiplied.

Though the 1960s' ferment in religions had initiated a movement away from affiliation with organized Western religion, it was rooted in American's unprecedented quest for knowledge of the world's major religious traditions. Comparative religion courses entered American school curriculums. Invitations began to come to Vedanta swamis from colleges across the country to lecture or teach accredited college courses on comparative religion.[68]

With this surge of interest in Eastern religions, the Ramakrishna Movement in America received increased news media coverage and publicity. The pioneer swamis and their American monastics were invited to participate in numerous radio, television, newspaper, and magazine interviews. As a

natural result of this increased interest and exposure, Vedanta's mailing lists began to grow.

The soul-searching idealism of the 1960s bore tangible fruit for the Vedanta centres, not only in their swelling congregations, numerous friendships, and distinguished contacts, but also in the flood of young people that entered the Vedanta monasteries and convents. The sudden growth of the American monastic family was graced from its inception by inspired American men and women. Swami Prabhavananda used to relate:

> When Swami Turiyananda was going to Shanti Ashrama, he told Sister Lalita: 'If I have one man realizing God I will be satisfied.' When Sister Lalita asked: 'Do you have such a man?' Swami Turiyananda answered: 'Yes, one' (meaning Gurudasa, Swami Prabhavananda always added).[69]

Gurudasa, or Swami Atulananda, born Cornelius Heyblom (1870-1966), has long been a special role model for Western monastics. Having lived in both Indian and American monasteries (his last stay at Shanti Ashrama was 1919-1922), the Swami's unique cross-cultural experience recorded in *With the Swamis in America and India*[70] continues to give valuable insights into Eastern monastic life as seen through the eyes of a Christian-raised Westerner. Above all, his spiritual stature gave early credibility to the success of the American monastic venture.

There were other exemplary American monastics who contributed greatly to the Ramakrishna Movement in America. Sister Christine (1866-1930) co-founded the future Sister Nivedita Girls' School in India. Brahmachārini Yatimata (Miss S. E. Waldo) edited Swami Vivekananda's lectures, and her notes of his classes at Thousand Island Park were later published as *Inspired Talks*. Bhakti, or Miss Helen Rubel (1898-1954),[71] gave to Swami Akhilananda her fortune, which helped to subsidize the Boston and Providence centres and the building of the Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math. Her meditative life 'profoundly impressed' such venerable monks of the Ramakrishna Order as the late Swami Abhayananda.[72] Sister Devamata, who studied as a brahmachārini under Swami Ramakrishnananda in India,[73] returned to the Boston centre to serve as Swami Paramananda's personal secretary, editor, writer, lecturer, and, at times, centre manager and mother superior to an unofficial sisterhood at Queensbury Street.[74] Swami Chidrupananda, or Al Clifton (d.

1996), Swami Ashokananda's monastic disciple of long standing, was appointed assistant minister of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco — the first Western assistant minister of an American Vedanta centre.

There has been a host of other exemplary Westerners whose service dedicated to the Vedanta work in America has given Westerners a proud sense of an emerging 'American' Vedanta. A few of these were: Miss Josephine MacLeod (1858-1949), Swami Vivekananda's 'lady missionary'; Miss Sarah Fox, President of the Berkeley Vedanta centre, whom Swami Ashokananda referred to as the most spiritual person he had met in America;[75] and Miss Ida Ansell, whose transcribed shorthand notes of thirteen of Swami Vivekananda's lectures and her written reminiscences of several direct disciples of Ramakrishna would give the world an insider's look at the early history of the Ramakrishna Movement in America.

Then there was Sister Lalita. She was told by Swami Turiyananda: 'You will have work to do, but it will be quiet work.'[76] Though the quarters of the Hollywood Vedanta centre were cramped, Pravrajika Varadaprana, the senior-most nun in America, remembered that it was Sister Lalita's presence that made the founding of a convent possible. 'Those of us who joined the household during the 1940s', Varadaprana recalled, 'were inspired by Sister Lalita's saintly character. We found Sister to be completely self-effacing, gentle and affectionate, with a radiant serenity.... You would never have known from her behaviour that this had been her own house.'[77]

In 1946 the trustees of the Ramakrishna Order officially sanctioned the convent at the Vedanta Society of Southern California.[78] In his article 'The Vedanta Convents in the West', Swami Swahananda recorded:

> The following year two nuns who had been living there for over six years were given vows of brahmacharya. The ceremony was performed in Santa Barbara on a newly acquired piece of property. Some of the nuns remained at the new facility in Santa Barbara, thus making that also an official convent.[79]

During this time there was also a group of women living a monastic life in San Francisco under the guidance of Swami Ashokananda. Swami Swahananda wrote:

> In 1958, Swami Ashokananda was granted permission to establish a convent, and brahmacharya vows were given in 1961.[80]

American Vedanta centres were founded with monasteries either within or adjacent to the centres. However, there remain today only two Vedanta Societies in America — the Vedanta Society of Southern California and the Vedanta Society of Northern California — with sanctioned convents, each convent with facilities in two locations.

Swamis Prabhavananda and Ashokananda, who oversaw the two largest monastic families in America, used training techniques which, though they differed dramatically, were fused by the same ingredient: LOVE. To both Swamis, their monastics were not an institution, but a family; they were not their 'workers', but their 'children'.

Swami Ashokananda borrowed techniques from the Catholic Orders, which he considered creditable because, as he explained, 'they had been in the business a long time'.[81] The rules were the same for the convent and the monastery. Monastics lived two to a room and were discouraged from corresponding with outsiders or visiting other centres. Because of dietary restrictions, Swami Ashokananda ate separately from his monks. 'Except for Al [Clifton]', Swami Yogeshananda remembered, 'the Swami seldom met with his monastic trainees. Yet, through the senior novice every detail of our life was regulated.[82] It was his custom at Christmas to give each of us some rather elegant gift, usually clothing or a book.'

Yogeshananda continued:

> One year, I understand, when he asked John [a brother monk] what he would like for Christmas, the latter replied, 'For you to come down and eat the dinner with us, Swamiji.' And he did.[83]

Swami Ashokananda could be a stern disciplinarian. Often he would scold Al, his closest disciple, in order to instill in a roundabout way a lesson intended for another novice. The Swami bent every effort to make his monks 'gentlemen' first, then monks, grooming them for a future public role in the American Vedanta work.

One hour a week the San Francisco monastics were encouraged to listen to Western classical music. 'Swami Ashokananda believed we ought to keep

our roots in our own culture', Yogeshananda explained, 'and enjoy and be inspired by those things which had been meaningful to us, provided they were elevating.'[84] For this reason, the Swami also discouraged such Hindu customs as foot-touching. He told the novices:

> You men are Western men. You are independent and have self-esteem. Why should you demean yourselves by doing a thing totally unnatural to you?[85]

Swami Ashokananda was a firm believer in study as an essential building block to a monastic's spiritual life. Both in the convent and the monastery, time was set aside in the mornings for classes in which his students were expected to actively participate. 'It is all right to have tentative ideas', he instructed, 'but not good to have vague ideas. Think everything out clearly.'[86]

Naturally the day-to-day proximity of the monastics with their abbot had its own reward. 'Most of our personal talks in the middle years', Yogeshananda remembered, 'took place in his own bedroom where he would sit in his dressing-robe at that littered desk and appear to be just chatting. It was here he told me that Swami Shivananda had told him that all his visions had been attended by the presence of light, and that this is one of the hallmarks of a true vision.'[87]

Under Swami Prabhavananda's direction in Southern California, monastic training was more open and informal. To him group living was the greatest austerity, and he urged his monastics to live in harmony with all. Like Swami Ashokananda, Swami Prabhavananda minimized Indianizing his Western monastics' etiquette. However, unlike the Northern California abbot, Prabhavananda ate and lived with his monastics. Whether at the dining table, on his walks, at living room gatherings, or in his room, the Swami was open and accessible to his children and their chit-chat, plans, problems, or spiritual questions. 'He inspired us', Varadaprana related, 'with talks about spiritual ideals and his reminiscences of the Holy Mother and the direct disciples.' At any time or place a monastic could receive a surprise lesson, Yogeshananda recalled:

> For some months I lived at the Hollywood Centre and on a sunny afternoon was mowing the back lawn while he paced the stone walk in front of his room. He surprised me by coming up close behind, then looking into my eyes and asking, 'Are you doing japa?' I think it happened to everyone.[88]

Swami Prabhavananda employed scolding as an affective training technique. However, the Swami disclosed one day:

> My way is the subterfuge way. I advise you or I scold you. But that doesn't bring about the real change. Then I go and pray to the Lord and ask him to give you a little faith and devotion.[89]

Varadaprana stressed how in training the monastic community Swami Prabhavananda 'set the example of meditating in the temple three times a day, which he expected others to follow.'[90] 'I feel great joy', the Swami admitted to his monks, 'when I see you boys trying to meditate on the Lord! I count this as my success. This is all I care about in my work — not the buildings and works, but the lives of you children; whether you are growing in devotion to God.'[91] From time to time the Swami would interview his monastics about their meditations and spiritual practices, showing his ever-present concern for their spiritual development.

In a letter to the Belur Math trustees, Swami Prabhavananda referred to the founding of the monastery and convent at the Vedanta Society of Southern California:

> Both these institutions will aim at God-realization through the unfoldment of the inner life, following a course of spiritual discipline, self-sacrifice and performance of household duties on lines set forth in the rules of the Belur Math framed by Swami Vivekananda.[92]

Carl Jackson, in his book *Vedanta for the West*, attempted to characterize the American members who joined the Vedanta Societies during the era of the pioneer swamis. His research approach was, as he stated, '....[through] examination of the Movement's literature, scattered interviews with contemporary Vedanta members, responses to an informal questionnaire circulated among selected members of the Movement, and a review of the conclusions of other scholars [leaving aside the Asian immigration, which significantly altered the Movement's profile as of 1965].'[93]

Jackson noted that typical members tended to come from middle class or upper-middle class families. They were generally adults with a disproportionate number of females (an average ratio of two females to one male). Most members were spiritual seekers, typically of a Protestant background, often previously

connected with Theosophy, New Thought, Spiritualism, or Christian Science. Jackson further revealed that a disproportionate number of members were foreign-born.

What drew these Americans to Vedanta ? Was it a rejection of Western values and religion or the attraction of Eastern teachings? In the book *What Vedanta Means to Me*, published in the 1950s,[94] testimonials ranged from those of famous writers, intellectuals, scientists, and business people to those of farmers, housewives, and a high school graduate. The greatest appeal these contributors cited was Vedanta's universality as opposed to Western Christianity's dogmatic sectarianism. Other contributors stressed Vedanta's practical experiential methodology along with its direct mystical approach. 'Vedanta made me understand for the first time', Christopher Isherwood disclosed, 'that a practical, working religion is experimental and empirical. You are always on your own, finding things out for yourself in your individual way.'[95]

Others mentioned Vedanta's wealth of psychological insight and positive understanding of human nature as providing a therapeutic perspective, beneficial for spiritual growth. Interestingly, contributors frequently mentioned that through their contact with Vedanta they received a renewed respect for the fundamental teachings of Christianity. Playwright John Van Druten explained that after his introduction to Vedanta, he could 'turn back' to Christianity, discovering 'much more' than he had 'ever suspected of existing'.[96]

The factors that enabled the Ramakrishna Movement to take solid root in America by 1970 were manifold — Vedanta's inherent appeal, the Movement's printed materials and published books, publicity the pioneer swamis received from prominent Americans, and, with the inter-religious movement of the 1960s, the swamis' continuous contacts with the country's clergy and academicians. And there were others.

According to Carl Jackson, 'The success of the Ramakrishna Movement in America has depended heavily on its attempt to adapt to Western conditions.'[97] Americans felt comfortable attending the Vedanta centres' Protestant-style Sunday morning sermons and weekly classes. Likewise the music performed at the services — cantatas, chamber music, folk songs, or musical compositions using translations of Eastern scriptural verses — was also familiar to the Western ear. Americans could easily identify with the swamis because they had adapted to America in dress, speech, and etiquette, without losing their

Indian integrity. In describing Swami Ashokananda, Yogeshananda could have been writing about almost any of the other pioneer swamis:

> Swami Ashokananda read scores of American books, picked up slang and colloquialism, talked with young and old, met hundreds of Americans and studied their ways. But his monastic habits, his preference for simplicity in food and routine...and probably his basic patterns of thinking did not change much; they were perhaps as Indian as when he left his land.[98]

Another factor in the Ramakrishna Movement's successful ingress into America was its non-sectarian approach. As Swami Ashokananda stated in a brochure issued at the public opening of the Sacramento centre:

> Vedanta is not a creed, it is, rather, the foundation of all creeds and religions — those not only of India but of the world; for it explains in rational terms the eternal laws governing all spiritual life and gives aid to all men and women in their spiritual unfoldment, whatever their individual religious affiliations and beliefs may be. It is, in truth, a Universal Philosophy and Religion, belonging to no one race of people, but to mankind as a whole.[99]

By becoming Vedantists, Westerners who were estranged from Judaism or Christianity did not feel they were joining yet another 'organized religion', nor did they feel 'converted'.

However, to American scholars and clergy, Vedanta swamis were the official representatives of Hinduism, which, as one of the ten major religions of the world, gave the Vedanta work, though a relative newcomer to America, the prestige of an age-old tradition.

How then did the Ramakrishna Movement in America maintain its two faces of non-sectarianism *and* Hinduism? Carl Jackson explained in his book:

> At one time Hinduism was classified in texts on comparative and world religions as an 'ethnic' or non-missionary religion, limited essentially to the Indian subcontinent.... Such a generalization is no longer defensible.... As the vanguard of the thrust of Hinduism outward, the Ramakrishna Movement has played a historic role of world significance.[100]

The Ramakrishna Movement emphasized its role of introducing to the world a revitalized Hinduism, rooted in the ancient tradition of the Sanatana

Dharma, or Eternal Religion, a tradition which purportedly transcends time and boundaries — racial, national, and sectarian. In this special sense, Vedanta is both the *youngest* religion and the *oldest* religion of the world. It can and does, therefore, represent both non-sectarianism and Hinduism — features which have given it a broader appeal and special status.

Yet another factor was the pioneer swamis' emphasis on the Vedanta philosophy rather than the cult of Ramakrishna. Swami Prabhavananda observed that his Sunday attendance dropped whenever he would speak on a spiritual personality such as Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, or Swami Vivekananda, but it would again rise when he spoke on karma or reincarnation. This was an experience common to the early swamis.

Carl Jackson echoed the caution of the pioneer swamis when he stated: 'There is some danger that in turning from a philosophical message to ritualism, the movement [would] minimize its attractiveness to Westerners.'[101] Undoubtedly, with this in mind, Swami Ashokananda discouraged his Western devotees from cultivating devotion to Hindu gods and goddesses. He further disapproved of traditional Hindu deities being worshipped in the American centres.[102] Swami Prabhavananda, however, made a distinction between the needs of the 'inner' and the 'outer' circle of devotees that came to the centre. He noticed that in the beginning of his work at the Hollywood centre, people had a tendency to come and go. Then in the 1930s, when the centre's shrine was installed and a short worship inaugurated, a nucleus of American devotees formed and began to grow. The preparation and performance of the daily ritual became a focus for those who attended the centre. Carl Jackson noted:

> The very existence of the convent and monastery testifies to the importance of devotionalism, since much of the time of the monastics is spent in meditation and various devotional disciplines.[103]

Special worships also provided an environment for devotees to mix with each other and become acquainted with the monastic community. It built family ties. The Vedanta swamis usually displayed a prominent photograph of Ramakrishna, along with pictures of other world teachers, on the main altar of their centres' shrines or lecture halls. However, each swami varied in the balance he struck between philosophy and ritualism.

Evidently the swamis succeeded in striking that correct balance. By 1970 the Ramakrishna Movement had become successfully established in the West. Based upon extensive research, historian Carl Jackson affirmed the well-recognized fact: 'It is in the United States to stay.' 'As an Oriental religious group preaching an alien message in an often hostile environment this has been a considerable achievement....' Jackson added:

> The membership is sufficiently large to assure survival; and the strong base in India assures a continuing leadership. The increasingly friendly attitude of Americans toward its work and the growing awareness of Oriental religions revealed by the recent period, provide a conducive environment for its future growth. Most new religious movements collapse within a single generation.... [However, the Ramakrishna Movement] has established firm foundations and is today in more flourishing condition than it has ever been. It has won increasing public acceptance, integrated a far-reaching movement, and found necessary channels to the outside public.

In short, Jackson stated: 'No other Oriental religious group has had a longer or more influential career in the United States.'[104] The Ramakrishna Movement owes much to the pioneer swamis. They came to 'a land that knew little of India's spirituality', and left behind a solid religious tradition.

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2 Later reprinted as *The World's Religions* [San Francisco: Harper, 1991], Dr. Huston Smith's book has sold over a million and a half copies.

3 Unpublished reminiscences of Swami Prabhavananda, recorded by Pravrajika Anandaprana.

4 Unpublished reminiscences of Swami Nikhilananda (courtesy of Swami Adiswarananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York).

5 A disciple of Ramakrishna.

6 Unpublished reminiscences, Vedanta Society of Southern California archives (hereafter VSSC archives).

7 The pioneer swamis in America included: at the New York west side centre, Swamis

Bodhananda (1912-1950) and Pavitrananda (1951-1977); at the Boston centre, Swamis Paramananda (1909-1940), Akhilananda (1941-1962), and Sarvagatananda (1962-); at the La Crescenta centre, Swami Paramananda (founder, 1923-1940); at the Providence centre, Swami Akhilananda (founder, 1928-1962) and Sarvagatananda (1962-); at the San Francisco centre, Swamis Prakashananda (1915-1927), Dayananda (1927, 1929-1931), Madhavananda (1927-1929), Vividishananda (1931-1932), Ashokananda (1932-1969), and Shantaswarupananda (1969-1970); at the Portland centre, Swami Prabhavananda (founder, 1925-1929), and Swamis Vividishananda (1929-1930), Devatmananda (1932-1954), and Aseshananda (1955-1996); at the Hollywood centre, Swami Prabhavananda (founder, 1929-1976); at the Santa Barbara centre, Swami Prabhavananda (founder, 1947-1976); at the Trabuco centre, Swami Prabhavananda (founder, 1949-1976); at the New York east side centre, Swami Nikhilananda (founder, 1933-1973); at the St. Louis centre, Swami Satprakashananda (founder, 1938-1979); at the Seattle centre, Swami Vividishananda (founder, 1938-1980); at the Berkeley centre, Swami Ashokananda (founder, 1939-1969); and at the Sacramento center, Swami Ashokananda (founder, 1949-1969) and Swami Shantaswarupananda (1969-1970). Though Swami Yatiswarananda never headed an official centre, he pioneered the Vedanta work in Philadelphia (1942-1949). [This above information was gathered from Swami Gambhirananda's *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957); Edith Tipple, 'Vedanta Centres and Indian Swamis Outside of India', *Prabuddha Bharata* (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, January 1997), 88-95]

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[17] Ibid.

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[19] 'Address of Welcome', *The Ramakrishna Math & Mission Convention: 1926* [The Math, Belur, Howrah, Sri Gouranga Press (undated)], 17.

[20] Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, [Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1973], III: 187.

[21] Unpublished accounts of Swami Satprakashananda, delivered January 7, 1957 [VSSC archives].

[22] Unpublished reminiscences of Swami Satprakashananda [courtesy of Phyllis Jacobsmeyer, January 6, 1992].

[23] Swami Akhilananda, *Spiritual Practices* [Cape Cod, Claude Stark, Inc. 1974], p. 11; and unpublished reminiscences of Swami Satprakashananda [courtesy of Phyllis Jacobsmeyer, Vedanta Society of St. Louis].

[24] Carl Jackson, *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishan Movement in the United States* [Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994], 82-83. Hereafter cited as *Vedanta for the West*.

[25] Ibid., 83.

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[28] Ibid., 224, 262-63.

[29] Ibid., 255.

[30] Ibid., 264.

[31] Ibid., 289.

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[33] A Bengali saying which means 'Go there and put down your roots.' Unpublished reminiscences of Swami Satprakashananda [courtesy of Swami Yogeshananda, VSSC archives].

[34] *Vedanta for the West*, 113.

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[37] Unpublished reminiscences of Swami Nikhilananda [courtesy of Swami Adiswarananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York].

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[39] Swami Yogeshananda, *Six Lighted Windows*, 203.

[40] *Vedanta for the West*, 110-11.

[41] Ibid., 111.

[42] Swami Yogeshananda, *Six Lighted Windows* [copyright by Swami Yogeshananda, 1995], 144-45.

[43] Ibid., 167.

[44] Convents were also opened in San Rafael and San Francisco.

[45] *Vedanta for the West*, 115.

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[73] *Bridge of Dreams*, 107, 140. See also Sister Devamata, *Days in an Indian Monastery* [La Crescenta: Ananda Ashrama, 1927], 1.

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[75] *Six Lighted Windows*, 159.

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Ramakrishna Movement in America
AN OVERVIEW OF THE YEARS FROM 1970

SWAMI ATMARUPANANDA

Buddhism in China *vis-à-vis* Vedanta in America

As BUDDHISM SPREAD from India through Asia during the centuries after Shākyamuni's Mahāparinirvāna, it carried with it India's cultural wealth — its arts and sciences, a system of writing and a profound tradition of grammatical analysis, medicine and mathematics, astronomy and astrology, logic and philosophy. Buddhism spread rapidly, historically speaking, because of four main factors: the wonderful character of the compassionate Buddha, the saintliness of the Buddhist missionaries, the policy of accommodation to the local culture (which accounts for the vast diversity of observance from one Buddhist country to another), and the wealth of Indian culture that followed in the wake of the missionaries.[1] By accepting Buddhism, other countries gained access to India's vast cultural wealth as well.

But China was already culturally rich and mature, conscious of its own glory, when the first Buddhist missionaries arrived at the beginning of the Common Era. It wasn't looking for imported learning or culture or values. Moreover, Indian spiritual culture was in many ways contrary to the values of Chinese society. It has been said that in India every great man has to have a divine past to be fully accepted, while in China even a deity has to have a human past to be believable. In India everyone showing extraordinary greatness in whatever field is seen as an Avatar of Vishnu or Shiva, Hanuman or Ganesha, or a partial Avatar of whatever aspect of divinity, and so it was with the Buddhist

saints and teachers who were connected in the popular mind with the cosmic Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. But while Indian culture has always been primarily spiritual, Chinese culture has been largely humanistic. Man was always the measure of all things, not God. Humanistic, family-oriented, intensely interested in human society and its dynamics, this-worldly China met Buddhism, a religion emphasizing transcendence, trans-social values, renunciation, celibacy, inwardness and meditation, detachment, a religion that was cosmic in its interest and scope. It didn't meet with instant success.

It took centuries for Buddhism to become established in China, and it became established only once it had become uniquely Chinese. This it did in a number of ways. It wedded itself to Taoism, the indigenous mystical tradition of China; it absorbed some of the Chinese deities, making them protectors of the faith or attendants on the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; it began to produce lineages of Chinese Buddhist masters who were spiritually capable of carrying on the tradition. In time Buddhism became a dominant cultural force in China, an amazing feat which waves of Christian missionaries over several centuries could not repeat, in spite of the vast resources, human and material, spent — enough to dwarf the resources of the Buddhist missionaries.[2]

It is easy to see a parallel between Buddhism in China and Vedanta in America. Swami Vivekananda brought Vedanta to an old culture. Yes, America was a new land, but her culture was European and therefore old. America was conscious of her power and greatness, even though that power had not yet manifested in the spectacular way it was to do in the twentieth century. She was conscious of her importance to the world, particularly in the realm of democratic ideals and social freedom. Her extroverted and active values were quite contrary to Indian spiritual values. And she already had a religion — Christianity, primarily Protestant Christianity. And that religion was not a moribund artifact but was vibrantly active.[3]

Is it then also going to take centuries to establish Vedanta in America? Looking at the Vedanta work in America now, a century after it was brought here, one is inclined to say 'yes'. And many do say so. The work has grown, but not much, not spectacularly. As an organized movement, it is not much of a force in American life. If you were to stop people on a busy street in America and ask if they had heard of Vedanta or of Swami Vivekananda or Sri Ramakrishna, you would have to stop a very large proportion of the city's population

before you would find a single person who had. And that is asking not for a follower, but just for someone who has heard of the words; and that, too, after a hundred years of the self-sacrifice of a number of dedicated and talented Vedanta teachers who have given up their home country of India to work in this unfamiliar land. If this is the result of a hundred years of dedicated effort, how many centuries will it be before Vedanta becomes well established? Will it ever become well established?

Will Vedanta Succeed in America?

First glances can be deceptive. There are several reasons why it won't take — in our opinion — nearly so long for Vedanta to establish itself in American culture as it did for Buddhism in China.

First, though American culture has old roots, and though it is conscious of its own value, it has from the beginning been a land of new ideas, a land of experimentation. Swami Vivekananda loved this about America: 'I love the Yankee land. I like to see new things. In America is the place, the people, the opportunity for everything.'[4] Therefore America doesn't offer the same resistance to foreign ideas as did China.

Secondly, Buddhist missionaries first went to China several centuries after the time of the Buddha. But the modern Buddha[5] himself came to America and spent the best years of his life here, spreading his message through his lectures, yes, but spreading his profound spiritual influence in a much more direct and transformative way through his very presence among the people and the land.

Thirdly, Swami Vivekananda taught Vedanta in America as a universal religion and philosophy, unloosed from Indian culture. Perhaps even more importantly, he showed how Vedanta provided a spiritual basis for the highest aspirations of American society — strength, greatness, democracy, human dignity, freedom, liberality, universality, generosity. Through his voice, Vedanta becomes the foundation of the American ideal, not a foreign thought to be rejected by the national consciousness like a transplanted organ. At the risk of being made a fool by subsequent historians, we predict that in a matter of decades from now, not centuries, Vedanta's presence and influence will be visible in America. The groundwork has been done, the foundation has been laid.

Finally, though perhaps unprovable to the sceptic, it is a spiritual principle that no true sacrifice goes in vain: its results may be delayed but never destroyed. The tremendous sacrifices made by so many teachers of Vedanta over the past one hundred years to establish Vedanta here, to train students in spiritual life, to thereby transform the students' lives, cannot go in vain. The existing centres rest on a solid foundation of unselfish activity and love for the ideal. In time that will bring its full fruit.

Vedanta has definitely not taken the Western world by storm, but there have been periods of significant growth in the past one hundred years. First, there were the phenomenal years when Swami Vivekananda himself was initiating the work in this country, followed by the significant work done by Swami Trigunatitananda, Swami Abhedananda, and others. The 1930s saw another period of expansion.[6] Then there came the 1960s.

The American Society since the 1960s and the Vedanta Movement

Since the 1960s, the West, particularly America, has never been the same. To discuss the succeeding decades, which interest us here, the 1960s must be understood. So let us take a few moments to trace the influence of the 1960s on the succeeding decades which this essay seeks to treat.

All in American society that has come after has come either as a result of the 1960s, under the influence of the 1960s, or in reaction to the 1960s. That is true as well of the Vedanta work of the Ramakrishna Order, though there are two distinct forces at work in the Vedanta Societies: the host culture and the swamis from India who head the Societies. Though the swamis-in-charge have not been affected in their formation by the 1960s, they have had to face the aftermath of the 1960s in their work, and thus in that sense have been influenced also. In the following pages we will at several points examine major influences of the 1960s which have affected the Vedanta work in the succeeding decades.

First in importance to us is the Hippie Movement which arose in the mid-1960s and lasted into the mid-1970s. The Hippie Movement was an unparalleled outpouring of youthful idealism, unrealistic and undisciplined, yes, but extraordinary in its scope, sincerity, and radical departure from the safety of convention. Young people sought meaning in life, and they sought

experience, not theories about life. They rejected the materialism they saw in their parents' generation, and sought spiritual nourishment wherever it was promised, whether through psychedelic drugs, or through living a life patterned after the radical life of Jesus (while thoroughly rejecting conventional patterns of piety and institutionalized religion), or through Eastern religions.

Yes, Eastern religions. Swami Vivekananda was the first Hindu teacher to cross the *kāla-pāni*, or 'black waters' of the ocean, to spread the teachings of Vedanta in the Western world. After him came a few other teachers like Swami Ram Tirtha, but no one was notably successful with a long lasting influence until Paramahamsa Yogananda established the Self-Realization Fellowship in the 1920s. With the exception of Hatha Yoga teachers and Self-Realization Fellowship, the Vedanta Societies had very little competition from other Hindu teachers until the 1960s. But the 1960s opened the floodgates. A number of Hindu teachers started coming, initiating a flow of gurus and masters from India which has still not abated.

One of the striking results of the 1960s was this increased interest in Eastern religions, which continued through the early 1970s. Attendance at the Vedanta centres was in general much increased. At the Hollywood and Santa Barbara temples, for instance, the temples were filled to overflowing, and arrangements had to be made regularly for overflow crowds. In Hollywood a large room in another building (the Green House living room) was opened up on Sundays with closed-circuit television to accommodate the crowds.

The monasteries and convents began to fill with novices as well, and centres such as Chicago, St. Louis, Seattle, and the East Side centre in New York City that did not have monasteries started them. In fact, the monasteries probably grew faster in the early 1970s than in the 1960s, because as the Hippie Movement began to decay under the weight of drugs and free sex, those with more spiritual interests often sought out a disciplined life in order to get what hippiedom promised but couldn't deliver. A non-scientific survey of Eastern groups, including the Vedanta Societies, shows that even today, in the beginning of the third millennium, most of the new American-born inquirers in Eastern traditions still come from the 1960s generation, which brings us to the question, what happened after the mid-1970s?

The Reversal of Values in America in the 1970s

In the late 1970s, interest in Eastern thought began to decline. This was seen in the reduced attendance at Vedanta services and in the reduced number of monastic applicants. The trend only got more pronounced in the eighties and nineties. By the late eighties our monasteries were getting all but no applicants. And the rare persons that did join rarely lasted to the point where they could take vows. A significant number of those who had joined the monasteries in the 1960s and 1970s didn't last either. The two trends — very few new applicants to the monasteries and a number of monastics leaving the monasteries — have left our monastic centres in serious difficulty. The average age of the monastic communities in the West has increased to upper middle age and beyond, and all of our centres that have depended on monastic hands to help with the work find themselves now severely shorthanded, putting an added strain on those left in the communities and on any new persons coming in.

What accounts for this change? One of the major factors is the change in society. A famous survey given to college students in the late 1960s asked them to rate in importance a number of different goals in life. Among them were such things as finding a meaningful philosophy in life, finding a suitable mate, getting a good job, making a lot of money, and serving others. In the late 1960s, the goal that statistically was most important to the students was finding a meaningful philosophy in life. Near the bottom were considerations like making money. During the eighties and nineties the results for the same test had turned bottom up: finding a meaningful philosophy in life rated near the bottom in importance, while making money and getting a good job rated at the top. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the departments of business administration and finance at American universities were empty, while philosophy, psychology, and religion courses were packed; during the eighties and nineties the opposite has been the case.

Why this reversal of values? That is hard to determine. However, American society seems to go through rapid cycles of action and reaction: whatever direction one generation goes in, their children tend to go in the opposite direction in order to assert their independent identity. This has provided cartoonists with a rich theme. For instance, in one, a long-haired hippie couple,

who once would have delighted in shocking their parents with their appearance and behaviour, now confront their own children who are well dressed, prim and proper, and then turn to one another and ask, 'Where did we go wrong?'

The New Generation of Swamis of the Post-1970 Period

In this our study of the years from 1970 onwards, we are not interested in cataloguing all of the activities of the Vedanta Societies. Most of the activities that were instituted earlier — such as Sunday lectures and one or two weeknight classes — continued during this period. Nor are we interested in naming all the principal persons figuring in the story. We are here interested in the broad picture, major changes in the Vedanta work in the West, and major changes in Western society that have affected that work.

Starting in the 1960s with Swami Akhilananda of Boston, Swami Siddheswarananda of France, and Swami Vishwananda of Chicago, a whole generation of swamis passed from the scene. Before these three Swamis left the body, the Vedanta work in the West had for decades been in the hands of disciples of Holy Mother and Swami Brahmananada. Swami Ghanananda of London was an exception, being a disciple of Swami Shivananda, but in many ways seemed to be of the same generation as the others. This extraordinary generation of swamis had taken over from the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and the disciples of Swami Vivekananda, and they were the founders of the majority of the centres existing today in the West. A widely varied group, some were very dynamic, some were quiet and retiring; some were gentle and approachable, some were fiery and awe-inspiring; many were great scholars, some accomplished writers; all were spiritual giants, possessed of the great power known as *guru shakti*.[7]

At the very end of 1969 — the end of the 1960s — two more of these giants passed on: Swami Ghanananda of the London Centre in November and Swami Ashokananda of the Vedanta Society of Northern California in December. The rest but one had left their bodies by 1980.

Swami Nikhilananda, founder of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York City and a disciple of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, passed away in a dramatic way at Thousand Island Park[8] immediately after chanting '*Om brahmārpaṇam*....' at the breakfast table. It was 21 July 1973, the same

date as the Holy Mother's mahāsamādhi in 1920. Swami Prabhavananda, founder of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, had a similar dramatic exit. In the summer of 1976 he was very ill, and it gradually became clear that he wouldn't recover. On the night of 3 July 1976, he came to consciousness and asked for the time. Learning that it was a little after 9:00 p.m. (of 3 July) and, therefore, not yet 4 July — the day of the bicentennial of American Independence, and also the day when Swami Vivekananda had chosen to leave his body — Swami Prabhavananda left his body to return to Sri Ramakrishna and to his master, Swami Brahmananda, on 4 July 1976 (12.03 a.m.).

In 1977 Swami Pavitrananda of the Vedanta Society of New York passed on. Swami Satprakashananda, founder of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, left his body in 1979. And Swami Vividishananda, founder of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington in Seattle left his body in 1980. Only Swami Aseshananda, disciple of the Holy Mother and head of the Vedanta Society of Portland, continued. The last of a generation in the West, he became a centre of pilgrimage, and his famous scoldings became blessings which people sought: sometimes people would return from a week-long visit and complain to other devotees that they had not received a single scolding. This remaining representative of a generation and monument to their legacy left the body in October 1996 at the age of 97.

As the members of this generation passed on, a new generation took charge, or really a generation and a half. First, there were disciples of later direct disciples who provided a transitional period. Swami Ritajananda and Swami Shraddhananda, disciples of Swami Shivananda, took charge of Gretz (France) and Sacramento[9] respectively. Swami Nityabodhananda, also a disciple of Swami Shivananda, fouded a new centre in Geneva, Switzerland, in the 1960s. Swami Sarvagatananda, disciple of Swami Akhandananda, took charge of Boston and Providence. And Swami Swahananda, disciple of Swami Vijnanananda, took charge first of Berkeley and then of the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

In 1965 after the death of Swami Vishwananda, Swami Bhashyananda was appointed minister-in-charge of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago, becoming the first of a new generation to take charge of a Western centre, being a disciple of Swami Virajananda and not of a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. From that time forward this new generation began to take

charge of the Western work, bringing new attitudes, new ways of working, and new energy to the Societies. The period from 1970 onwards can therefore be seen as a period of adjustment and in many ways as a period of searching for new self-definition, to which we will return.

Areas of Growth in the Vedanta Movement from 1970 onwards

Though the attendance at services and the size of the monastic communities have in general dropped since the early 1970s, there have nonetheless been significant areas of growth in the Vedanta Movement in the West.

A beautiful new women's retreat facility was dedicated on the Olema retreat property of the Vedanta Society of Northern California in 1972. In the late 1970s the London centre was moved from the city to the village of Bourne End, occupying a large and impressive mansion with many rooms and large, beautiful grounds. The Seattle centre purchased land for a retreat centre in the countryside north of Seattle in 1975, which they have developed beautifully. In 1982 they also acquired a large and attractive house in Seattle, across the street from the main building. In 1983 a new branch of the Vedanta Society of Southern California was opened in San Diego, and in 1986 it was officially accepted by Belur Math as a monastic branch centre of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. This was the first new centre in the Western world since the founding of the Vivekananda Monastery and Retreat in Ganges, Michigan, in 1968. Though certainly not falling within the Western world, we should nevertheless mention the very active and devoted group of devotees in Japan, since the work there follows more the pattern of a Western centre than the other centres in the East. In 1984 Nippon Vedanta Kyokai, or Vedanta Society of Japan, purchased its own property near Kamakura, and a swami was sent by Belur Math to be its spiritual head.

A group of devotees in Toronto, Canada, had been very active for some years when a swami was sent there in March 1989 to start an official centre of the Ramakrishna Order. In March 1995 he was able to buy a charming new building that serves the needs of the centre as if it had been designed for the purpose. The centre was affiliated to the Order in 1999. In May 1990 a swami was sent to Amsterdam, Netherlands, to run the first centre ever in that country.

First living in a rented flat, in the spring of 1993 the centre was so successful that a house was purchased. In March 1992 a swami was sent to start a centre in Moscow, Russia — another first — where work had been cultivated through occasional visits of senior swamis for some years. The Swami, faced with the difficulties of a Russia in historic transformation, is yet in great demand, being invited to different parts of the old Soviet empire, including Eastern Europe. The centre was officially declared to be a branch of the Order in 1993. The story of the Vedanta Movement in Russia has been dealt with in a separate article in this volume. In 1995 the St. Louis centre acquired a building next door to the main building which has significantly expanded the space available for their use. The New Temple in San Francisco, Northern California, dedicated a large new wing in 1997.

At least since the 1930s many had felt that the Order should have a presence in the capital of the United States, and several swamis had tried to establish one. Finally that wish has been fulfilled with the establishment of a new centre in a Maryland suburb of Washington DC in May 1997 under the spiritual leadership of the head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. A sub-centre of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, was started at Ridgely Manor, New York State, in 1997, which was visited by Swamiji on three occasions, viz. twice in 1895 and once, for ten weeks, in 1899.[10] It celebrated the centenary of Swamiji's visit there in August 1999.[11] In July 1998, the first full-sized bronze statue of Swamiji in the USA, a gift from the Vedanta Society of Chicago to the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont, Illinois, was unveiled and dedicated in presence of more than 1000 persons.[12]

The Buenos Aires centre was till now alone in the continent of South America. It had several very well established groups in Brazil and Uruguay. As a result, an ashrama was started by a group of devotees in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1974. It was named Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, which later got affiliated to the Belur Math in 1999. Like Japan, we need to mention here about the centre at Sydney though it does not fall within the Western world. This centre was started in 1998. It was made a branch of Ramakrishna Mission in 2000 under the name Vedanta Society of Sydney. A new centre in Germany — another first — was started in December 2004 at Bindweide. This was one of the recent additions to the Order's list of centres. Germany had Vedanta

groups in different cities which were active and well organized. In fact, devotees and admirers of the Vedanta Movement in Germany have been active since the 1930s. But Germany had to wait all these decades to get its first permanent centre. The history of the centres in South America, Europe, South Asia, and Australia has been delineated in separate articles in this volume. In April 2004 the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York dedicated its new building at 19 East 94th Street.

There have been other areas of significant growth besides new centres and new buildings. During the last thirty years a number of swamis have travelled to many parts of the Americas and Europe, giving talks and meeting inquirers and devotees. In some places where swamis have visited repeatedly, groups of devotees have formed themselves into private centres, some of them meeting in homes and others acquiring their own facilities. The Vedanta Society of Kansas City, Missouri, was a very active private centre. Recently, in 2005, it was made a sub-centre of the Ramakrishna Math under Vedanta Society of St. Louis. Similarly, the private centre at St. Petersburg, Florida, was func-

tioning under the guidance of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York. In May 2006 it was made a branch centre of Ramakrishna Math, Belur. Both these centres are especially well established, with their own buildings and regular activities. The private centre in Atlanta is similarly well established, though it doesn't own its own building. It was started under the auspices of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago. However, presently it is not connected with a particular official centre.

Several centres have published books during the last three decades. Most active during the period under review have been the Vedanta Society of St. Louis and the Vedanta Society of Southern California, both having published a number of new titles. Journals have been published for many years from the centres in England, France, and Buenos Aires. The Seattle centre started its new English quarterly known as *Global Vedanta*, the first issue having been published in June 1996. This is the first official American journal since *Vedanta and the West* was discontinued by the Vedanta Society of Southern California in 1971. At the initiative of a devotee, the *Vedanta Free Press* was started in the United States in the early nineties. It recently changed its name to *The American Vedantist* and, more importantly, changed its tone from a voice for the disaffected to a more constructive voice for the larger Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement in America.

Before the 1970s, bookstores were rare at the centres: most had just a book table with a few basic titles available. But from the late 1960s to the present, many centres have developed bookstores, some of them large, impressive, and diverse. The centres in Hollywood, San Francisco, Sacramento, Chicago, and Buenos Aires have mail-order book catalogues which are quite active and regularly updated. Further, the late 1990s saw Vedanta Movement entering the cyberspace. Apart from the conventional mode of disseminating information through books etc., our centres developed Web sites providing the visitors infromation about the ideas and ideals of the Vedanta Movement and also about the activities and regular programmes conducted in the centres. The Vedanta Society of Southern California's site was launched during the centenary celebration of Ramakrishna Mission in 1997. A steady increase in the number of visitors to our sites has been seen in the past years.

During the decades under review, the Order's interreligious activities have grown as well. Many of the centres are active members of the interreligious

councils found nowadays in most large American cities. The Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago was instrumental in the organization of the grandly impressive Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1993 in honour of the World's Parliament of Religions of 1893 where Swami Vivekananda was introduced to America. In December 2000, the Vedanta Society of New York offered a special service: 'The Role of Vedanta in the New Millennium', which was well received.[13] The Chicago Vedanta Society organized a conference on *Vedanta in the Third Millennium* in June 2001, which had a commendable participation of delegates coming from ten states of the country.

As the city of New York observed the first anniversary of the terrible events of September 11, 2001, the *Spiritual Oneness of Humanity* was the theme of a unique event held at the New School University Tishman Auditorium. On 22 September 2002, the spiritual leaders of all centres of the Ramakrishna Order in the United States and Canada came together in New York for this historic event organized by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York. More than 500 persons filled the auditorium where this interfaith service focussed on the need to make sincere and intense efforts towards a more peaceful world, calling attention to the disturbing incidents of violence and hatred in recent years that had caused many to feel helpless, confused, vulnerable and fearful for the future of our small planet.[14]

The Centre of Indic Studies, University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, organized a conference on the topic *Impact of Swami Vivekananda's Voyage to the West* in June 2003. Several academicians, monks of the Ramakrishna Order, as well as many students and members of the general public attended the conference.[15] In 2004 the Vedanta Society of Northern California observed its Memorial Day special programme to commemorate Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birthday. Over 1000 people attended the celebration. The topic of discussion was *Women Saints and Their Inspiring Legacy*. There were five speakers representing five religions, viz. Sufism, Judaism, Catholicism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Vedanta.[16] In June 2005, as a part of the celebrations of its platinum jubilee, the Vedanta Society of Chicago held a conference on *Vedanta for the Global Village* at the Vivekananda Monastery and Retreat in Ganges, Michigan. The conference, which was one of the largest gatherings of swamis of the Ramakrishna Order in the US, focussed on the message of Vedanta and its value for the Global Village.[17] Now the construction of a new Sri Rama-

krishna Universal Temple is on its list, which will be an important milestone in the growth of the Movement in the West.[18]

On the topic of growth let us finally mention that, though the trend since the early 1970s has been reduced attendance at services and shrinking monastic communities, very recently there has been an indication that the downward trend might be reversing. A few centres have experienced significantly increased attendance in recent years, and just in the past few months several new monastic recruits have either joined or are waiting to join. The change is too recent for it to be called a trend; time will tell whether it is a new growth trend or just a brief anomaly. With monastic recruits in particular, a trend can't be declared until new people make it to final vows.

It is quite evident that, though attendance has been down and monasteries have not been attracting many recruits, the centres have continued to push forward the work left them by Swami Vivekananda in several important and impressive ways.

A Growing Awarness of the Need for Service Activities

For some years — since the early 1970s — there has been increasing interest among a number of devotees and monastics in the possibilities of service work in the West. For the past one hundred years the general feeling has been that, though India needed service work because of her poverty, underdevelopment, and lack of literacy, the West was relatively wealthy and well-provided for and thus had no need for service work. The growing interest in service work in the West has a twofold basis: a growing recognition of the deep social problems facing Western society which call out for help as governments do less and less to remedy them, and also a growing awareness of the intrinsic importance of service in the message of Swami Vivekananda.

Two responses to this growing awareness may be mentioned. Nuns of the Sarada Convent in Santa Barbara began in 1985 to participate in an interreligious programme in Santa Barbara to feed the homeless. Homelessness in the United States has become a major social ill caused by changing economic times, changing political priorities, and changed policies in treatment of the long-term mentally ill: the mentally ill may no longer be kept in hospitals unless they are certifiably dangerous to themselves or to others. This last factor

has meant that all across the country there are large numbers of people who are mentally too unstable to work but not dangerous enough to be put in mental hospitals, and who therefore end up homeless on the streets or in the public parks of cities, unable to provide for themselves. The Santa Barbara nuns take their turn the first Wednesday of every month, cooking and serving food to the homeless and hungry.

The other response is a programme started by the San Diego monastery in 1993 as a part of its celebration of the centenary of the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. San Diego is located on the border with Mexico, a third world country. The border town on the Mexican side is Tijuana, a burgeoning centre of industry and trade that cannot provide the infrastructure to sustain its own growth, especially its population growth which is exacerbated by the rapid inflow of the rural poor looking for work. There are a number of schools in Tijuana for which the government provides only teacher salaries — nothing for building construction, school supplies, sports programmes or anything else.The San Diego centre adopted one such school in a very poor neighbourhood and has been helping it by providing clothing, school supplies such as pencils, ball-point pens and notebooks, and most recently the possibility of large-scale help with building construction and ground improvement.

Social Problems Facing the Vedanta Movement in America

We have mentioned the Hippie Movement and how it affected attendance and monastic applicants during the 1960s and early 1970s, and how a social reaction set in which led to reduced interest in Eastern religions. There are other aspects of the Hippie Movement that have carried on through the generations. As mentioned earlier, part of the Hippie Movement was a seeking for experience. That affected morality as well as the search for meaning. On an unprecedented scale hippies began to question the old Judeo-Christian ethics. People wanted to know why something was considered immoral; and if they weren't satisfied with the answer, they delighted in breaking the code. Victorian morality, remnants of which were still with us in the 1960s, was seen by the hippie generation as repressive, based on fear of natural impulses. Love was hailed as the ultimate good, sex was identified with love, and therefore sex was hailed as the ultimate good. That has left a lasting legacy. People started

becoming sexually active earlier and earlier in life, sex was more and more openly glorified, it was 'freed' from many of the old taboos, and thus it became more and more casual — never so casual as the Hollywood film and television industries portray it, but certainly much more casual than it had ever been in Western society.

This change in sexual morality has also, no doubt, helped put into decline the numbers of monastic applicants. Sex is seen as so natural and desirable a part of life that celibacy is seen as strange and perverse. And modern psychology has supported this view, seeing celibacy as a particularly unnatural, repressive, and cruel form of useless self-denial. This rejection of moral absolutes based on tradition and authority has also meant that Vedanta teachers have had to adapt by explaining more carefully the 'whys' of morality.[19] They also have had to choose between either relaxing the standards expected of newcomers or adhering to their standards in the face of drastically declining numbers who can meet them.

The Effects of the War in Vietnam

Simultaneous with the Hippie Movement was the growing protest movement against America's war effort in Vietnam. The war began to escalate swiftly from the mid-1960s, as did the American and world voice in opposition to America's involvement. This movement in America was largely a movement of college-aged boys and girls who saw the war as unjust and sustained by a corrupt military-industrial complex supported by blind or, worse, cynical politicians.

With the Vietnam war and its great abuses of power, and the lies and misinformation and intrigue that supported it, America lost her innocence. Before that, Americans had a deep belief in their own intrinsic goodness and in the goodness of their institutions. For the first time the Vietnam War caused the loss of this faith on a national scale. No longer could Americans naively believe that they and their institutions would always do the honourable and right thing in any given situation. Then in the early 1970s came the revelations about Watergate, the famous scandal centred around President Richard Nixon. These two together — the Vietnam War and Watergate — more than anything else caused a loss of faith in authority. 'Question authority!' became a mantra

for many. That, too, has had its effect on the Vedanta Societies: on the guru-disciple relationship, on the head-of-centre and member-of-centre relationship, and on the monastic communities. Authority is questioned much more quickly than it used to be, and such questioning is seen as a virtue by many, not as evidence of bad breeding. Internal conflicts erupting into social friction can result when a person wants to have faith in the guru but has a trained-in voice in his mind — even in his conscience — saying: 'Question authority. You're a free citizen in a free country. What is wrong is wrong, no matter who says it.' And that voice comes with the force of moral authority: to question is moral, to obey unquestioningly is to empower people like Hitler and is therefore immoral. It is extremely important to the success of the work in the West that it be recognized that this is a genuine moral conflict based on a conflict of values between two different cultures, not just crude egotism raising its ugly head. Combine this moral conflict with the associated moral conflict between the West's long tradition of pro-active confrontation with injustice and India's even longer tradition of passive acceptance of circumstances, and you have the makings of serious misunderstandings. This has always been a cultural conflict that the swamis from India have had to face. It has only increased during the last three decades.

With this loss of national innocence has come another change. Naive belief in one's innocence based on lack of awareness is not a healthy quality, nor is it genuine innocence. But belief in one's own guilty nature resulting in self-loathing is perhaps even worse, because a man without faith in himself is one who cannot have faith in anything. A person without love for self cannot love another. A widespread national guilt complex has weakened people's belief in the power and possibility of goodness, of innocence, of dignity. It has led to scepticism in regard to heroes and teachers and leaders, scepticism in regard to truth, in regard to selflessness and self-sacrifice.

Though this loss of faith makes today's inquirer more wary, it also presents Vedanta with a challenge. People want to believe in something higher, but are afraid to do so because so many leaders — religious and secular — have proven themselves scoundrels unfit for trust. When, however, people do find someone who is trustworthy, someone who does what he says and practices what he preaches, then the impact can be great because it is so unexpected and yet so desired.

A Growing Indian Presence

Another heritage of the 1960s that has affected the work a great deal is the liberalizing changes that were made to immigration law in the late 1960s, allowing many more people of non-European origin to immigrate to the US. Since then a large and constant flow of Indian immigrants has changed the demographics of American cities, university campuses, professional associations, research institutions, and businesses, including the demographics — and therefore the social dynamics — of the Vedanta Societies.

It is common now to hear on the news media stories about the American scientist Dr. Amukh Chakravarti, or 'And now, here is our reporter, Chitra Raghavan, in Washington DC', or 'The Chief Executive Officer of such-and-such American software company, Mr. Dave Gupta, says that…', etc. Indians are found doing well in all walks of American life, and second generation Indians have been born, brought up, and educated here in the United States, being as American as individuals of English or Polish or Japanese extraction.

And naturally some among these Indian immigrants attend our Vedanta centres, at some centres in quite large numbers. This, too, has brought a new challenge to the centres. There are the American devotees of non-Indian ancestry who often have little interest in Indian culture and customs but much interest in the universal philosophy and spiritual practices. There are the Indians who also come to the centres for spiritual nourishment, but who naturally feel that they are coming to their own place where they are free to be themselves and don't have to pretend to be white Americans; they enjoy having a cultural touch of 'home'. To further complicate matters, there are some Americans who are madly in love with everything Indian, and some Indian-born devotees who are highly Americanized by choice.

Most of the American devotees of non-Indian ancestry feel estranged from a centre that becomes very 'Indian' in a cultural sense, while many Indians feel estranged from a centre that is kept culturally neutral for the sake of the American devotees. It is a situation which cannot satisfy all. Yet the heads of the centres have had to work out some sort of balance. Time will reveal what method and what mixture of cultures works best. This is an experiment in progress.

The Role of Women in the Vedanta Movement

Since Vedanta was first brought to the West by Swami Vivekananda, women have played a major role in the Movement. Swamiji himself noted that in the America of his time, men were absorbed in business concerns and making a living, while women of the middle and upper classes had the time and energy for self-improvement, cultural events, and volunteer activities. It was largely the women who supported his work with their time, energy, and money. That continued. The centres in the West have, since their inception, depended upon the volunteer labours of tireless, dedicated women to carry on the work — manual labour such as cleaning and cooking, and managerial work as well.

During and after World War II, women started entering the work force in larger numbers. Until the 1970s, however, most married women were still housewives. Starting in the 1970s, larger and larger numbers of women have entered the work force. At first, middle and upper class women entered the work force mainly to win and assert their freedom from the traditional roles and expectations society shoved upon them. Once they were in the work force in large numbers, however, the socio-economic structure seemed to make an adjustment so that now it is difficult for a family to survive financially unless both husband and wife work. What started as a choice has now become for many a necessity.

This change has made it increasingly difficult to run the Vedanta centres on a volunteer basis. The housewives who used to finish their housework quickly and then come to the centres to volunteer are now very, very few and mostly elderly. Most women devotees work full-time, and also take care of their families and housework, leaving no time or energy for taking on volunteer responsibilities. Besides, there are many more broken homes than before the 1970s, leaving many women alone, raising their kids, supporting the family, and playing both mother and father. This, combined with the declining monastic numbers already mentioned, has put a great strain on the centres.

Women's attitudes have changed with time, too. They are no longer willing to submit to the assumed superiority of men, nor to the idea that they have their place in the home while men have their place everywhere else. Nor are many women today willing to be treated as objects of men's fancy, as once was assumed quite natural. Swami Vivekananda would certainly be pleased

with this change. He often criticized the Western tradition of chivalry, which he said was nothing but sex-consciousness.

Because this change in attitude is quite recent, and because it is still causing changes in society with all the painful adjustment that such radical change entails, there is a great deal of sensitivity around what today are called 'women's issues'.

What once might have been considered a funny joke by both sexes, might be deemed belittling to women today because it assumes certain things about them which they are fighting against. This sensitivity has also affected the Vedanta work during the last thirty years, especially the last fifteen to twenty years as women have become progressively more conscious of gender-based injustices. As often happens in such situations, that sensitivity often leads people to see injustice where it was never intended, and sometimes where it doesn't even exist.

There is increasing frustration among some women (and men) about Sri Ramakrishna's use of the term 'women and gold'. It doesn't matter how often one explains that Sri Ramakrishna was not getting women, it doesn't matter how much one explains that Sri Ramakrishna worshipped womankind as the Divine Mother, it still irritates some people to the point where they don't want to read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* because they see behind the term thousands of years of worldwide repression of women. 'It pushes their buttons.'[20] Some resent the fact that the centres are run by men, that the speakers are men, that the gurus are men. Some see monasticism as inherently sexist. Obviously the swamis can't change their gender nor can the monasteries become 'coeducational', but the swamis are having to face increasing pressures and expectations regarding women's issues, and the role of women in the Vedanta Movement is likely to change with time as a result.

Internal Challenges Facing the Vedanta Movement in the West

The lower attendance since the 1960s has been noted, and we said that one reason is the changes that have taken place in society. That is no doubt true. However the question naturally arises whether there is something we can do to make the message of Vedanta more relevant to modern people. That is

quite likely the case, and it will take time and experimentation to see what is effective.

The services at the Vedanta centres have remained more or less unchanged for the past hundred years. A hundred years ago it was common for people to attend lectures. It isn't today. Do we then pander to the five-minute attention span? Many churches do: they emphasize entertainment and fast changes in the programme in order to keep people's attention. The Vedanta centres have not succumbed to that temptation, and hopefully they never will. A five-minute attention span has no hope for spirituality. Some minimum expectations have to be maintained. However, today seminars and participatory programmes are much more in vogue than straight lectures. Both formats are effective ways of communicating spiritual understanding.

Also popular are retreats. Experience at centres like the Ramakrishna Monastery at Trabuco Canyon and the Sarada Convent in Santa Barbara and the Centre Vedantique in France shows that people are willing to drive a significant distance to get to a service held in a beautiful, natural setting; often more willing than to drive a short distance to a centre in a cramped city. Swami Vivekananda himself once said how much good it would do America to have places of spiritual retreat away from the cities. What our Vedanta Movement has not had are structured retreats where lay people can go for extended periods for instruction and practice. Buddhist groups and other Hindu groups have run very successful retreats for decades.

Another challenge facing the centres is what to do for advanced students. The lectures and classes typically keep the newcomer in mind. But what about those who have been coming to lectures for many years? Many of them start feeling the need for more advanced classes and training. How is that to be provided? The declining number of monastics was mentioned early in this essay. That is another challenge facing the monastic centres. How can we attract more young people to the monasteries? If we succeed in attracting them, what can we do to keep them?

Two main causes for monastic dropout are always (1) the psychological baggage that the applicant brings with him into the monastery, and (2) the applicant's inability to sustain monastic aspiration in the face of the attractions of the world. The monastery can only help a person so much in getting over these internal difficulties. But those are not the only difficulties. Not everyone

drops out of the monastery because of psychological problems or weakness in front of temptation. Part of the problem is that a place for Western monastics has yet to be clearly established.

Originally, young men came to the swamis wanting a monastic life, and a few of the swamis accepted such novices into the centres; that is, the young men wanted a place, and some swamis decided to provide one. The monasteries thus developed largely without a conscious intention. As a result there has not been, for the most part, an intentional programme of training. That has meant, however, that Western monks are left by and large without the ability to carry on the traditions of the Order or to assume leadership responsibilities.

But young people coming to inquire into monastic life usually want to know what type of training they will get, how it will benefit them more than living in the world as devotees, and what it will lead to. As American Vedantic monasticism has not yet taken on a conscious, identifiable form with role models exemplifying what one can aspire to, most young people lose interest fast. Therefore, another major problem facing the work in the West in the beginning of this 21st century is establishing an identity and role for Western monastics. There are too many challenges facing the work now to discuss them all. Let us complete this section by just listing some of them that we consider very important.

How can the needs of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees be met while remaining open to and relevant to those who seek principles only? How can we provide for greater participation in the study, practice, and work of Vedanta than is provided now? — the opportunities provided now being mainly the chance to practise at home, attend lectures, and do the clerical or housework for the centres. Is there, for instance, a place for the type of service work which was so dear to Swami Vivekananda and so important a part of his message? Is there a place for a 'third order' as found in Christian monastic circles? That is, would it be possible and beneficial to give some sort of official recognition and support to those devotees (and there are many) who cannot or do not wish to join the Ramakrishna Order, but who also do not want family life, and yet want a greater degree of commitment to the ideal?

And are there other ways for both a deeper and broader participation, where 'deeper' means more advanced study and practice while 'broader' means more varied? How can Vedanta be given a cultural expression that is meaningful

to Westerners? That is , how can Vedanta be clothed out so that it speaks deeply to the culture and not just to the mind? Is there a way that public pujas celebrated in the various centres can be made more congregational, participatory acts of worship without losing their deep, meditative character?

How can we provide for the social needs that religions in the West traditionally fill — like marriages, funerals, rites of passages, blessings? Swamis traditionally do not involve themselves in social rites and rituals, which are performed by priests. Thus many people whose lives have been centred on the Vedanta Societies have no other option but to look out to fulfil their liturgical needs, there being no Ramakrishna-Vedanta priests. They end up going for secular, governmental services, or else for services provided by other religions.

These are some of the major challenges facing the Ramakrishna Order's work in the West at the beginning of this twenty-first century. And they will be met. The Order's dynamism and vitality and integrity — spiritual and practical — assure us of that.

Conclusion

The past three decades have, in spite of difficulties and setbacks on some fronts, been years of growth and development; they have also been years of transition and change for the Vedanta work in the West. The causes of transition and change are various, some lying within the Vedanta centres themselves and others in the surrounding culture but impacting the centres. As always, this period of transition is also a period of challenge. Equally certain it is, however, that this period of challenge offers unique opportunities. Most certain of all is that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda did not sacrifice their lives for their work to disappear after a century. Their work continues, and it is bound to succeed. All who hear their call to participate in it are highly blessed, we believe eternally blessed.

References

[1] It seems doubtful that it was primarily the philosophy itself that caused Buddhism's rapid spread. Buddhist ethics were wonderfully attractive, but the philosophy was difficult. It denied that which most religions promise: an immortal, individual soul and God.

[2] With a few notable exceptions, Christianity did not adapt itself to Chinese culture until it was too late: the antireligious communists came to power before the Christian missionaries had fully appreciated the mistake they had made in keeping Christianity tied to European culture. And the notable exceptions, like the Jesuit Father Matthew Ricci, had their efforts at accommodation to Chinese culture counteracted and condemned by the Church.

[3] We deliberately use the word 'active' instead of 'alive' because that is what it was, while spiritually speaking it was at best stagnant.

[4] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama], VII: 498-99.

[5] We refer to Swami Vivekananda as the 'modern Buddha' because of a number of similarities between the two — in their lives and in their missions — too many to list in an endnote, but obvious to anyone who takes the time to compare the two, even cursorily.

[6] The extraordinary success of Swami Paramananda should also be mentioned, which spanned the period from the 1910s to his early demise in 1940, and which does not fit into the overall historical pattern we see in the Vedanta work.

[7] The 'power of the spiritual preceptor', that is, the power to transform lives.

[8] The retreat where Swami Vivekananda had given his famous *Inspired Talks*, purchased by Swami Nikhilananda for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre.

[9] Swami Ashokananda had founded the centres in Berkeley and Sacramento as sub-centres of the Vedanta Society of Northern California in San Francisco. When he died, those two sub-centres became independent centres.

[10] *Bulletin* [Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission], Nov 1997.

[11] Ibid., October 1999.

[12] Ibid., August, 1998.

[13] Ibid., February, 2001.

[14] *Global Vedanta*, Fall 2002, Vol. VII, No. 4, p. 12.

[15] Ibid., Summer 2003, Vol. VIII, No. 3.

[16] Ibid., Summer 2004, Vol. IX, No. 3, p. 15.

[17] *Vedanta Kesari*, Sept 2005.

[18] Ibid., Jan 2003, p. 36.

[19] Here 'morality' refers almost exclusively to sexual morality. There is not the same degree of confusion over telling the truth, honesty, etc.

[20] A common American phrase meaning to strike someone's sensitivities, making them react.

Ramakrishna Movement in South America — Argentina*

SWAMI PARESHANANDA

EARLY, THE COUNTRY known to us as Argentina was called El Plata, and included Paraguay, Uruguay, southern Bolivia and modern Argentina. Spain created the new viceroyalty to strengthen its territories facing the Portuguese colonial power in Brazil. With Napoleon's rise in Europe, in 1810, the Spanish colony became autonomous with its government located at Buenos Aires. Soon afterward, in 1816, under a new name, Rio de la Plata, it declared its independence from royalist Spain and with the liberation of Peru in 1824 under José de San Martín and Simon Bolivar, independence became a reality.

When Spain, the great European power of the early sixteenth century, arrived to colonize the southernmost region of South America, the country was inhabited by only about three hundred thousand nomadic tribal people. By the late 1800s, when large-scale immigration took place from Italy, Germany and Spain, most of these indigenous people had died under the rigours of serfdom (not slavery), or were racially absorbed by the incoming races.

Argentina quickly became prosperous, educated and modernized, in fact more advanced than any other South American country. But due to heady success, many social inequities developed just before and after the turn of the century and there followed widespread social disorder, military coups and

* Reproduced (after updating) from *Prabuddha Bharata*, January 1991, pp. 46-52, 'Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedanta Movement in Argentina'.

economic disasters. Argentina gradually slipped into economic chaos, which is a great problem even now. Democratic government returned to the country after the Falkland War in 1983.

Argentina is the second largest country in South America and is about the same size in land area as India. Bounding the country on the North and East are Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay, and on the West, the great Andes Mountains and Chile. The highest peak in the western hemisphere, 22,834-foot Aconcagua, is here. Argentina is blessed with fertile land and thick forests in the mountain region. Her people are mostly of European descent, but include also Amerindians, Mestizos (mixed Amerindian and European), and other non-European groups. Spanish is the official language, but other widely spoken languages are English, Italian and French. About thirty-nine million people live in Argentina. Most are Roman Catholics.

The Lord indeed gets his work done in wonderful and mysterious ways. Swami Vivekananda remarked in his public address to the people of Calcutta in 1897 on the great wonder that was the power of Sri Ramakrishna, how '...that son of a poor priest, born in an out-of-the-way village, unknown and unthought of, today is worshipped...by thousands in Europe and America, and tomorrow will be worshipped by thousands more.' 'Here has been the manifestation of an immense power', he said, 'just the very beginning of whose workings we are seeing, ...and before you is the fact that within ten years of his passing away, this power has encircled the globe!'

Who can trace the hand and thoughts behind the well-known publishing house of Buenos Aires, Editorial Kier's publishing of *El Evangelio de Ramakrishna*, the first Spanish translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in the year 1912? It was a translation of the English version of Swami Abhedananda. About this time too, the growing interest in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta led to the formation of a Vedanta Society (*Sociedad Vedanta)* in Buenos Aires City by some admirers. By 1922, this Society had published *Karma-Yoga*, *Rāja-Yoga* and *Jñana-Yoga* of Swami Vivekananda in Spanish (translated by Mr. M. Lopez Villamil and Mr. Ricardo Vivie). The pioneering contributions of this society towards spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta in Argentina were really outstanding. As a result, many distinguished thinkers of this and other Spanish-speaking countries became deeply interested in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature.

Amado Nervo (1870-1919), the great Mexican poet and writer, and one of the noblest and most famous writers of all times in Spanish literature, wrote the following touching letter to the Vedanta Society, Buenos Aires, after reading *El Evangelio de Ramakrishna*:

Madrid, 30 July 1916

Mr. Ricardo Vivie
Vedanta Society
Buenos Aires

My Esteemed Sir,

You have made me a very valuable present by sending seven books. All of them are really nice; but I must say the admirable *Gospel of Sri Rama-*

krishna — which has been a real revelation for me — excels them all. What a profundity under its crystalline innocence! How beautiful are the parables! (for example, of the wall behind which there is the Absolute!) I had read long ago with deep emotional interest the *Gospel of Buddha*, classified and arranged methodically by Paul Carus. It impressed me much, but less than this delightful *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, so profoundly familiar, so familiarly profound. From today it will be one of the books at my bedside. One of those which I carry with me everywhere. It is a small mystic lamp for searching God, outside this spider net of philosophies, of rituals and of metaphysical disputes. It is impregnated with very pure love and no threat casts its shadow over those pages of mysterious whiteness.

Those short, compendious treatises are very well written, above all: THE IDEAL OF A UNIVERSAL RELIGION. About the other volumes, I will tell you after I read them repeatedly.

Such a Centre as the Vedanta Society, glorifies the Republic of Argentina, which could neither continue nor be understood in many other countries.

Now I am reading attentively the *Curso Adelantado de Filosofia Yoga* (The Advanced Course of Studies in Yoga Philosophy).

Many thanks for this spiritual gift. Please send such gifts always. Your most affectionate friend,

Amado Nervo

Ricardo Güiraldes (1886-1927), the author of the Spanish masterpiece (novel) *Don Segundo Sombra*, was one of the leading and most famous writers of Argentina. In the preface to his famous book *El Sendero*, his wife Adelina Del Carril wrote:

> Güiraldes longed for the real sources of oriental spiritual wisdom. *The Aphorisms of Patanjali*, commented on by Swami Vivekananda, made a well-aimed impact on his feelings and understanding, and he was fascinated by them. The same deep impression was created by the abridged *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The unity of God and His Creation is the great message for this age.

First Ramakrishna Ashrama

Before 1930 there was another Society named *El Hogar de Amigos de Buenos Aires* in the city which undertook in-depth studies of Indian philosophical thought. Mr. Joseph Schmidt, Dr. Bartoleme Allodio, Dr. Miguel Catalano, and many other members of this Society felt keenly the wish to have a Hindu Vedantist come to Argentina to guide them. Mr. Schmidt, expressing this desire, wrote in a letter on 4 May 1931 to the English monthly of the Ramakrishna Order, *Prabuddha Bharata*, at Mayavati:

> ...At the same time, I shall be greatly obliged if you would be so kind as to tell me if there could be any possibility of a Hindu Vedantist coming to this country, as there is a great field for this doctrine in this country. There is a great deal of interest, as I said, for this study, and many of my friends have told me that if any Hindu philosopher would like to come to this country, his passage would be paid and he would be taken care of during his stay here.

The Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* forwarded the letter to the authorities of the Ramakrishna Math at Belur Math. There were then some more exchanges of letters between Belur Math and the group in Argentina. In one, Mr. Schmidt wrote: 'I beg to say that there are some members who would like to have some real pictures [photographs] of Sri Ramakrishna and also of Vivekananda.' At last, moved by the earnest entreaties of the group, Belur Math deputed one of their able monks. Swami Vijayananda reached Buenos Aires by steamship on 10 December 1932, most probably the first Hindu sannyāsin ever to go to Argentina. Soon after, he gave his first public address on December 18. Thereafter, a course of classes on religion and philosophy were started and the Swami established personal rapport with the followers. In 1933, the first birthday anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna in Argentina was celebrated.

One Mr. Chiodi, an ardent follower of the society in Buenos Aires, arranged for an apartment for the Swami. On 18 March 1933, the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Argentina, was founded in the Buenos Aires City by Swami Vijayananda. The following report, published in the *Prabuddha Bharata's* January 1937 issue, gives some idea of the Swami's many activities in the early years:

> Swami Vijayananda, Head of the Ramakrishana Ashrama, Buenos Aires, South America, reached Belur Math on the 19 December after five years of strenuous work in the cause of Vedanta. The Swami was deputed in 1932 for the first time to expound in that distant land the catholic and universal Gospel of Hindu philosophy at the earnest request of Academia International 'Schmidt' of Buenos Aires, of the Argentine Republic. We are glad to announce that the Swami has been able to capture the imagination of the enlightened people of the land by his masterly presentation of the essentials of Vedanta, by his profound scholarship, saintly life, and his magnetic personality. He has held systematic religio-philosophical classes and discourses and delivered a series of thoughtful lectures on a variety of subjects. The Swami has succeeded in arousing in the public mind a lively enthusiasm and an abiding love for Vedantic ideals and Indian culture. To facilitate his preaching work the Swami learned Spanish. Indeed the publication of numerous works on Vedanta in Spanish under the auspices of the Sri Ramakrishana Ashrama which he founded there, the growing demand for his lectures, and the phenomenal expansion of his field of work bear an eloquent testimony to the splendid success which has attended his activities on alien soil in the midst of manifold difficulties and handicaps. We extend our heartiest welcome to the Swami.

On 3 July 1941, the Ramakrishna Ashrama shifted to Bella Vista, a beautiful suburb thirty kilometres to the west of the main part of the city. The property for the Ashrama was donated by a devoted lady, Mrs. Ninon Wolf de Kahn. The activities of the Centre increased and attracted many spiritual souls. Swami Vijayananda did commendable work spreading the Master's ideas and Vedanta in Latin America. He had a masterful knowledge of spiritual subjects. His exemplary life and cheerful personality captivated the hearts of people. The April 1948 issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* appreciated the yeoman service of the Swami:

> ...The Swami has established a permanent Vedanta Centre in the beautiful locality of Bella Vista, just a few miles away from the centre of the town. Formerly he used to hold ten classes in a week (five in the mornings and five in the afternoons). and give two public lectures and two radio talks in a month. The most original work of the Swami, which one very much appre-

ciates, are his morning classes where he has an average attendance of about sixty people — doctors, ladies, and persons belonging to all sections of life, who come at the early hour of seven-thirty to meditate with the Swami and have lessons of meditation along with the scriptural classes.

The Swami has published in Spanish four *Yoga* books and the *Inspired Talks of Swami Vivekananda*. He has also written six original books in Spanish. In the course of the current year he hopes to publish [a new translation] of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *The Pancadasi*, a standard book on Vedanta. At present he holds three classes — one on Vedanta and two on comparative philosophy.

Even today many people cherish the fond memory of Swami Vijayananda for his gifted personality and compassionate heart. *Prabuddha Bharata* continued:

In the short period of these few years he has succeeded in making many people interested in the message of the Vedanta and Indian culture. Some of his students are trying to put into practice the teachings of Vedanta in their daily lives. They are deeply interested in the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, whose keynote is that all religions are true. As such, many students belonging to Catholic families feel quite at home in his classes. His book on Christ, written in Spanish, is so much appreciated that it has passed into the third edition. The same is true with the French translation of this book. The Argentine Republic is the stronghold of the Roman Catholics, who hold very dearly to their own interpretation of Christ. Even amongst them, the broad and liberal views of the Vedanta are spreading steadily.

Swami Vijayananda is the first Indian in the whole of South America who has learned the language of the people (Spanish), and is bringing India and Latin America in close touch. His radio talks are much in demand, and through them he reaches a vast multitude of people from Buenos Aires to Mexico. We hope he will be able to continue this work of love, understanding and spiritual culture and make those distant brethren of ours realize that, given opportunity, any man can wake up the dormant spirit of Universal Consciousness in him.

Thus the Swami continued his life of total dedication for the cause of Truth till the end. He passed away in Bella Vista on 1 September 1973, radiating peace, serenity and joy.

The Swami used to visit regularly for lecturing several places in Argentina and Brazil. He also lectured in Chile, Colombia, Guatemala and Peru. In Brazil, even now, there are more than one hundred devotees who received spiritual initiation from him.

The frequent visits and dedicated guidance by the monks of Buenos Aires Centre helped much to organize and form the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centres in São Paulo and other cities of Brazil. There is now an official centre of the Order in the name of Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama in São Paulo City, which was, until its affiliation, managed by Professor D.A. Gomes, Mr. Ernani Buffalo, Mr. Tanetaka and the other devotees. The centre was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Order in 1999. This Ashrama also has a retreat in Emb Guaçu, a place about fifty kilometres away from the centre of the city. In March 2006, three Vedanta groups in the cities of Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, and Rio de Janeiro respectively were officially recognised by the Order as sub-centres of São Paulo Ashrama.

There are three small groups of admirers of Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta in Uruguay, in the cities of Montevideo, La Paloma, and Rocha. The activities in this country were started by Mr. P.B. Humberto, the first resident Secretary of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Argentina.

Some Notable Events

Miss Josephine MacLeod had regular correspondence with Swami Vijayananda. She was a great admirer and friend of Swami Vivekananda. In 1935 she came all the way from North America to meet the Swami in Buenos Aires and encourage him.

The centenary of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was celebrated in 1936 with jubilation. There were religious and cultural programmes. Several distinguished persons delivered their speeches, all echoing the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings.

Another event of great importance was the centenary celebration of Ramakrishna Mission in 1997. The Buenos Aires Centre, for the first time

Swami Vijayananda

Ramakrishna Ashrama, Buenos Aires

Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, São Paulo

Devotees in front of Curitiba centre

in its 60 years of existence, organized a large scale four-day celebration — the first day in the Ashrama, and the remaining three days in one of the prestigious halls of Buenos Aires City. Several dignitaries were invited. The cold relationship that existed between the Mission and the political and ecclesiastical institutions in Argentina steadily grew cordial in the aftermath of this event. The Government named Ramakrishna Mission as the official representative of Hinduism in Argentina, invitations from the clergy and inter-religious programmes became more frequent, and also a close rapport was established with the Indian Embassy.

The Ashrama

This Ashrama became a registered society in 1957. Mrs. Adelina Del Carril Güiraldes became the first President. The following letter of blessings was received from Revered Swami Shankarananda, the then President of the Ramakrishna Order:

Ramakrishna Math
November 29, 1957

> Twenty-five years ago, in response to the request of a few friends in Argentina, the Ramakrishna Math Headquarters sent one of its accredited members, Swami Vijayananda, to Buenos Aires to deliver the universal spiritual message of Sri Ramakrishna in that far off country. The bulk of humanity is composed of the followers of the great, ancient religions, and human welfare depends on the sincerity with which men and women everywhere strive to appreciate religious harmony and understand one another's point of view. In the world of today, which is more or less preoccupied with material pursuits, this mutual understanding amongst the followers of different religions is essential to array the forces of religion against irreligion. It is therefore very encouraging that the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Buenos Aires, has, on the eve of its silver jubilee, been given a legal status as a religious Association by the Government of Argentina. May the Ashrama ably spread the life-giving message of Sri Ramakrishna all over Argentina as also in the neighbouring states of South America, is my earnest prayer to the Lord.

With blessings to all the devotees,

Swami Shankarananda
President

In the year 1969, the Government of India sent Swami Ranganathananda as its cultural ambassador to many countries. He visited six countries of South America, viz. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Panama, Peru and Venezuela. The Swami stayed in the Ashrama for two weeks. On 25 August, afternoon, he gave a press interview at the Indian Embassy Chancery to four television channels, four leading newspapers, and to a journal. He delivered a series of lectures in the Salvador University and at other places of Buenos Aires. The following report from local newspaper gives an idea of the impact of the Swami's visit. *La Prensa*, the local daily newspaper reported:

> Arrived in this city, under the auspices of the Indian Government and the Escuela de Estudios Oriental de la Universidad del Salvador, professor Swami Ranganathananda, an outstanding scholar of the Hindu philosophy, member of the cultural and spiritual movement started by Sri Ramakrishna in 1886 and organized by Swami Vivekananda, its first President. He is a member of the Council of the Ramakrishna Mission in Belur Math, India, and one of its Directors.
>
> FROM FATHER BERCENA: In the meeting held yesterday in the local Indian Embassy, Swami Ranganathananda was introduced to the press by Father Bercena, Head of the Oriental Study School of the Universidad del Salvador, who, in his introduction, said, that 'It is necessary to understand the depth and breadth of oriental thought, and also to remove some misunderstandings that so often are attached in the West to the oriental customs and thoughts.' He also said that, 'Whatever happens in the next ten years in the Asiatic South-East, will have a decisive influence on the whole world in the next century.'
>
> In the course of his lecture the Swami said: 'Hindu philosophy seeks to unite the oriental tradition with modern science — the theme that fascinates all the intellectuals of this part of the world, and it is trying to do so without creeds or dogmas.' He hinted that Vedanta philosophy was scientific, rational and humanistic, and that it did have a great influence over the minds of men on many parts of the world.

In this context, it may be worthwhile to quote here the significant observations of Swami Ranganathananda about the influence of Vedanta on the Latin American countries:

> Once a measure of social justice is achieved in these countries, by peaceful democratic or violent revolutionary methods, they are likely to end their long history of political turbulence and enter on a peaceful and cooperative social evolution, for which they possess two priceless assets, namely, the complete absence of racial attitudes and tensions, unlike in the neighbouring United States, and a fund of emotional richness in their human populations which incline them to be informal, hospitable, and friendly. And with the discarding of bigotry and intolerance by Catholicism, which forms the main Christian denomination in these Latin American countries, and with the deeply ingrained religious attitudes of their peoples, we can predict a steady evolution of a rational and progressive Christian religion of the Bhakti type among them. This development will be aided powerfully by the Vedanta influences flowing from India since half a century, in a trickle, and since the post-war and post-Indian-Independence years, in a flood. And the most striking aspect of this Indian impact is that it is keenly welcomed and sought-after by these peoples. Spanish-American and Portuguese-American books on Indian Culture, Hindu religion, Vedanta, and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought are coming out of the presses in increasing numbers year after year. Anti-Indian attitudes and forces, which sometimes surface in these countries, are nurtured more by powerful outside influences than by indigenous national ones, which, on their part, find themselves also thwarted by those very outside influences.

Over the years many distinguished persons and earnest seekers of God have been visiting the Bella Vista Ashrama. They come from interior places of Argentina and from other countries. But because of the vast geographical distances it is difficult for swamis of the Ramakrishana Order to come often. Even so, during the last decade, the Ashrama and its admirers have had the privilege of meeting Swamis Ritajananda of France, Bhavyananda of London, and Swahananda of the US. Their visits have always created a festive atmosphere here. Devotees and admirers enjoy the opportunities of coming into close contact with them, and the swamis gladly grant personal interviews,

hold group-meetings, and also accept invitations to lecture outside the Ashrama.

It is a matter of joy and great satisfaction to write that during the last ninety years many have contributed generously and worked untiringly to help in spreading Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna's teachings far and wide. Special mention may be made of Humberto P. Barrea, Enrique C. Linton, Jorge Després, Antonio Morgado, Alberto Terracina, and Otto Schneider whose help was considerable in publications and other activities of the Centre. Doña Olga, Carlota E. Elsbach and Emma Martierena are also to be remembered for their support and sacrifice for this noble cause.

Swami Paratpara nanda succeeded Swami Vijayananda in 1973 and conducted the affairs of the Centre ably till his return to India in 1988. He translated *Vedantasara* into Spanish and completed the translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Swami Nikhilananda's English version). Professor Otto Schneider helped much in our literary work. He was the President of this Centre for a long time.

Monica Von Kleist, at the age of twenty, came all the way from Letonia. She stayed as a dedicated resident member till she passed away in 1974 at the age of forty-eight. María Elena Fernandez was another dedicated soul who served the Ashrama for fifty years, till her demise in 1991. Her loving and dedicated presence was an inspiration to all.

The Ramakrishna Ashrama of Argentina has also been the cradle of the first Latin American monks of the Ramakrishna Order: one from Brazil, one from Uruguay, and two from Argentina. All these are facts that show the deep penetration of the ennobling and enriching teachings of Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna, which are spreading quietly in Argentina and also in other parts of the world, helping to bind humanity together spiritually into one great human family. It was very aptly remarked by Mahatma Gandhi and is still true today, 'In this age of scepticism, Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light.'

Ramakrishna Movement in South America — Brazil

PART I*

LUIZ ANTONIO SOUTO MONTEIRO AND SWAMI BHASKARANANDA

IT WAS BRAZIL in the late 1960s. The military had taken full control of the country. The arrogance of the military personnel had made civilians feel like strangers in their own country. Though fuming inside, the civilians were too scared to show their dissatisfaction with the military government for fear of reprisal. One day during this period, some people were waiting in line to board a bus in a city in Brazil. Among those waiting was a gray-haired gentleman in his early seventies. He was a well-dressed man of dignified bearing. In spite of his age there was something leonine about him. Standing in line ahead of him was an elderly lady. The bus arrived and it was the lady's turn to enter the bus. Suddenly a military officer rudely forced his way ahead of her and tried to board the bus.

His behaviour was totally inappropriate. People standing in line were shocked, yet most were too afraid to protest. But the elderly gentleman roared like a lion and sternly shouted at the rude officer, 'Officer, stop, this is the lady's turn! You've no right to enter the bus. You should be at the end of the line!' The elderly gentleman's words carried such authority that the officer became nervous and somewhat reluctantly went to the end of the line.

* Reproduced (with minor changes and after having updated the matter) from the *Global Vedanta*, Summer 1999, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 2-4, 'Vedanta in Brazil' by Luiz Antonio Souto Monteiro and Bhaskar Puri.

This spirited gentleman was Swami Vijayananda of the Ramakrishna Order of India. Fearlessness was the hallmark of his character. At the time of the incident he had been visiting Brazil from Argentina at the invitation of some friends.

He was the founder and head of the Vedanta Centre in Bella Vista, a town on the outskirts of Buenos Aires in Argentina. Both in Argentina and Brazil he was well known as a religious leader, a powerful orator, and an author of several books. He had also translated into Spanish nearly a dozen classics on Hinduism, some of which now have been translated into Portuguese – the language of Brazil. Since founding the Vedanta Centre in Buenos Aires City in 1933, he had lectured on Vedanta (Hinduism) throughout Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Over the years he had appeared on many radio and TV talk shows both in Brazil and Argentina.

The First Preaching of Vedanta in Brazil

Swami Vijayananda was the first to effectively preach Vedanta in Brazil. He was a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, an illustrious and saintly disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. In 1957 Swami Vijayananda was invited by Dr. Maria das Dores Pereira da Silva to visit Rio de Janeiro interested in Eastern religions. Before that she and her husband, C. Rodrigues Carvalho, had visited Swami Vijayananda off and on in Argentina. The Swami accepted their invitation and arrived in Rio on October 10. He first stayed for a few days with them and later moved to the Luxor Hotel on Avenue Atlantica de Copacabana. On this first visit to Rio, Swami Vijayananda gave several lectures in the city. He was interviewed by the press and was also on radio talk shows. The first lecture he gave was at the City Hall of Representatives. Other lectures were given in the Halls of the Work Ministry, Education Ministry, etc. On this visit Swami Vijayananda stayed in Rio for about a month.

Meanwhile an interesting development was taking place elsewhere in Brazil. Professor Djalme Augusto Gomes, a concert pianist and teacher of music in the city of São Paulo, had read about Sri Ramakrishna around 1956 and wanted to have a picture of him. As no such picture was available in São Paulo, he wrote to Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order in India. The Ramakrishna Order promptly sent him the picture with the

information that it had a branch in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the head of that branch was Swami Vijayananda from India. Professor Gomes was elated and wrote a letter to the Swami in Buenos Aires. But owing to some mix up in the mail the letter never reached the Swami. However, he wrote a second letter that Swami Vijayananda did get. From then onwards he corresponded with the Swami off and on and learned that the Swami would visit Brazil in 1957.

In 1957 Professor Gomes went to Rio de Janeiro at the same time when Swami Vijayananda was staying at the Luxor Hotel in Rio. Professor Gomes went to see the Swami and was very much impressed by him. By the time Swami Vijayananda returned to Argentina, Professor Gomes had become the Swami's disciple along with Dr. Maria das Dores and her husband, Mr. Carvalho, Ribamar, Rogerio, and three other devotees. Dr. Maria and her husband left the Vedanta group after a few years and became interested in Buddhism. Eventually Dr. Maria joined a convent and became the first Buddhist nun in Brazil.

After his first visit in 1957, Swami Vijayananda visited Rio every year until 1972, staying there for eight weeks during each visit. In 1957 a strange coincidence brought Miss Cordelia de Jesus of Rio de Janeiro to Vedanta. She was at that time a junior executive and secretary to the manager of Banco de Credito Pessoal of Rio. One day a junior bank employee named Delphin Meirino Martinez happened to read some very interesting news in a newspaper lying around the bank. Obviously the paper had been used to wrap up currency. It contained the information that a certain Hindu Swami who had been visiting Rio from Argentina for the past few days would give his last lecture at 4 p.m. that afternoon. This Swami was no other than Swami Vijayananda. Delphin drew Cordelia's attention to the news and Cordelia, who was Delphin's supervisor, permitted him to go and attend the lecture. Delphin was so impressed by the Swami that later he talked about him a lot with Cordelia. As a result Cordelia felt the urge to correspond with the Swami. She sent a letter by seamail to him but unfortunately it did not reach him. Swami Vijayananda received her second letter sent by airmail.

When Swami Vijayananda came to Rio for a visit in 1958, Cordelia went to see him. The Swami asked her, 'What do you want from me?' 'I would like you to put me at the feet of the Lord', replied Cordelia. Then the Swami asked,

'Would you like to have spiritual initiation tomorrow?' Cordelia said, 'Yes'. Thus Cordelia became a disciple of Swami Vijayananda, and from then on started living like a celibate nun. Delphin also became Swami Vijayananda's disciple the same day Cordelia was initiated. Later Delphin became a novitiate monk and was given the name Brahmachāri Saumyachaitanya by his guru. Due to Swami Vijayananda's annual visits, the number of devotees in Rio increased and a Vedanta group was started in a rented house. The group was not an affiliated branch of the Ramakrishna Order, but maintained its allegiance to Swami Vijayananda and through him to the Ramakrishna Order of India.

The First Ashrama of the Rio Vedanta Group

Gradually the devotees in Rio felt that the Vedanta group should have its own home. With the financial help of some generous devotees, a nice property was bought in 1972. The property had large grounds and buildings, even a swimming pool. Swami Vijayananda asked Brahmachāri Saumyachaitanya to live there and take care of the Ashrama. After the passing away of Swami Vijayananda in 1973, Swami Paratpara nanda became the head of the Buenos Aires Vedanta Centre and continued with the preaching work started in Argentina and Brazil by his illustrious predecessor.

During his time, however, due to a misunderstanding, the devotees in Rio split up into two groups. One group under the leadership of Brahmachāri Saumyachaitanya took control of the Rio Ashrama and severed its ties with Swami Paratpara nanda and the Ramakrishna Order. Brahmachāri Saumyachaitanya is now the guru there.

The Second Ashrama in Rio and the Formation of the Rio Vedanta Society

The other group consisting of Cordelia, Lothar Wolff, Lauro and his wife Tina, Luiz Antonio and his wife Eneida, and other devotees remained loyal to Swami Paratpara nanda and the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Paratpara nanda returned to India in 1988 and Swami Pareshananda was sent by the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order to be the head of the Vedanta Centre in

Buenos Aires. He has continued the tradition of visiting the Vedanta groups in Brazil regularly, including the one in Rio.

Even though the Rio Vedanta group regularly held meetings from 1975 onwards, it was officially registered as a Vedanta Society only as late as 1990, with Cordelia de Jesus as its President. The name of the Society is Grupo de Estudos Ramakrishna Vedanta. It is this group that the Swamis and Pravrajikas (nuns) of the Ramakrishna Order and Sri Sarada Math visit. In December 1992 Cordelia formally donated a condominium in Rio de Janeiro owned by her to the Vedanta Society there. When the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, or the Pravrajikas of its sister organization, Sarada Math, visit Rio, they stay in that condominium. In 2001 the Centre acquired a large building as its new home. After undergoing minor remodelling to suit the requirements of the Centre, the building was inaugurated by Swami Smarananda, the General Secretary of the Order, in June 2002.[1] In March 2006 the Centre was made a sub-centre of Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, São Paulo.

The Vedanta Group in São Paulo

Meanwhile, upon his return to São Paulo, Professor Gomes became instrumental in forming a small Vedanta group there in 1957. Swami Vijayananda visited that group annually from 1958 until 1972, staying each time for two weeks. Over the years all these visits helped the group gradually grow larger. The first Vedanta devotees, besides Professor Gomes, were Ulisses, Dr. Rick and Tanetaka.

After the passing away of Swami Vijayananda in 1973, his successor, Swami Paratpara nanda, started visiting São Paulo from Buenos Aires. During his time the São Paulo Centre saw more rapid expansion. On the advice of Swami Paratpara nanda, it was formally registered in 1974 as Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama. The Society now has its own home donated by Professor Gomes, and a beautiful retreat centre in Embu Guaçu about thirty minutes' drive from São Paulo. Mr. Ernani Buffalo, another disciple of Swami Vijayananda in São Paulo, donated the retreat property. The present number of members and friends of the Society is around 150.

During his visit to Brazil in 1971, Swami Vijayananda gave Brahmacharya vows to some disciples. After the ceremony he told them, 'The Divine

Mother has revealed to me that my mission will be fulfilled only when a resident Swami is sent by our headquarters to Brazil.' As though to fulfil that prophecy, the Ramakrishna Order sent Swami Nirmalatmananda to be the head of the São Paulo Vedanta Society in March 1999. He is the first resident Swami of the Ramakrishna Order in Brazil. And the Vedanta society in São Paulo is the first society in Brazil to be officially affiliated with the Ramakrishna Order. In August 2004 the centre acquired a second house in its neighbourhood. This acquisition will be of great help to the better functioning of the ashrama. In addition to its being spacious, it has a larger hall to hold meetings and other events. Later, in September 2004, Swami Sunirmalananda was send by the Belur Math to assist Swami Nirmalatmananda.[2]

The Vedanta Group in Curitiba

Swami Vijayananda never visited Curitiba although some of his disciples lived there. They formed the nucleus of the Curitiba Vedanta group. The group initially consisted of Victor Ruiz Pereira, Maria da Luz Miru Pereira, Marly Miru Pereira, Jandir Carlos Wellner, and Nilson Spessato Ferreira. Swami Vijayananda's successor, Swami Paratpara nanda, first visited Curitiba in 1976. From then onwards he came every year until he returned to India in 1988. During his visits he mostly stayed in the country house of Jandir Carlos Wellner. In 1978 an informal Vedanta Society was started. At the initiative of Joao Antonio Trevisan and twenty other devotees and friends, the Society was formally registered on 6 December 1991. The first President of the Society was Jandir C. Wellner. Now the Society has 33 registered members, as well as several friends. Mr. Wellner donated his fair-sized condominium in downtown Curitba for the use of the Society and the visiting swamis of the Ramakrishna Order. In 2001 this condominium was sold and a house in the neighbourhood was bought to be used as the new home of the Society. After renovating the building to suit the Society's needs, it is being presently used for the centre's activities.[3] In July 2003 a newly-built lecture hall named the 'Vivekananda Hall' was inaugurated.[4] In June 2004 the centre inaugurated its new lending library. It was started due to the generosity of some women devotees of the Society.[5] In March 2006 the Centre became a sub-centre of Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, São Paulo.

The Vedanta Group in Belo Horizonte

Swami Vijayananda never visited the city of Belo Horizonte. However, Miss Nogueirinha Gomes Nogueira, a disciple of the Swami, lived there. Swami Paratpara nanda visited the city twice and Swami Pareshananda has come a few times. A Vedanta Society was founded in Belo Horizonte in 1991 mainly at the initiative of three disciples of Swami Paratpara nanda — Jose Tolentino Leite Neto, Elson de Barros Gomes Junior and Jose Mauricio Benjamim de Oliveira. The Society was dissolved in 1993. However, some 8 or 10 devotees held meetings whenever a visiting swami or nun of the Ramakrishna Order visited Belo Horizonte. Finally, in July 2001 the Belo Horizonte Vedanta Centre was formally registered as a religious institution with Swami Nirmalatmananda as its President. The new name of the Vedanta Centre is Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta — Belo Horizonte. In December 2001, the new building of Belo

Horizonte Vedanta Centre was formally inaugurated. Many devotees from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, and other cities of Brazil participated in the event.[6] The Centre was made a sub-centre of Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, São Paulo, in March 2006.

Visits of the Monks and Nuns of the Ramakrishna Order to Brazil

Since the late 1960s, many monks and nuns have visited the Brazilian Vedanta Societies and have inspired the devotees. Other than the swamis of the Buenos Aires Vedanta Centre, several monks and nuns of the Ramakrishna Order, as well as a few nuns of its sister organization, Sri Sarada Math, visited Brazil. His Holiness Swami Ranganathananda, the thirteenth President of the Ramakrishna Order, visited the Vedanta groups of Rio and São Paulo in 1969. Thereafter Swamis Bhavyananda, Ritajananda, Swahananda, Bhaskarananda, Chetanananda, and Pravrajika Bhaktiprana (of Hollywood Vedanta Centre) visited Brazil — some of them several times. Among the nuns of Sri Sarada Math, Pravrajikas Vivekaprana and Satchitprana have visited the Brazilian Vedanta groups as well.

The First Visit of a Ramakrishna Swami to La Paz, Bolivia

In 2002, Swami Pareshananda, the present head of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Buenos Aires, visited La Paz in Bolivia, being invited by the devotees there. He gave two talks on meditation and spiritual life. More than 120 people attended the talks, indicating an increasing interest of the Bolivians in Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Many people there have read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *The Four Yogas* of Swami Vivekananda. This is the first time a swami of the Ramakrishna Order has visited La Paz.[7]

The Future of the Vedanta Movement in South America

Sri Ramakrishna once said that spiritual teachings are like the seeds of the tropical Vajrabatul tree. Its fruits explode scattering the seeds in far-flung areas — away from the dense foliage of the mother tree. Thus they can sprout and grow freely into healthy, robust trees. Similarly, the seeds of Vedantic

thoughts from India have been scattered all over the world. The first seeds of Vedanta were sown in South America in 1932 when Swami Vijayananda came from India to Argentina at the request of some Argentine citizens interested in Eastern religions, particularly the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Since that time the message of Sri Ramakrishna has been slowly but steadily spreading across South America.

Interestingly, at the turn of the twentieth century, the great Swami Vivekananda had a prophetic vision. He saw a banner with the name of Sri Ramakrishna flying on top of the Andes Mountains. This prophetic vision has been only partially fulfilled. We are sure its full significance will be felt all over South America in the fullness of time.

In his book *Sri Ramakrishna Deus Homem* (*Sri Ramakrishna the Godman*), Swami Vijayananda writes (p. 203) about his meeting with Mahendranath Gupta (Master Mahasaya, also known as 'M') as follows:

> Three months prior to my coming to Argentina I was invited to give a lecture at Keshab Sens temple.... When the lecture was over, one of Keshab's followers told me that Master Mahasaya was waiting for me.... By the time I had offered my pranams to him he said to me very affectionately, 'I've heard your beautiful lecture. You are one of our standard-bearers. But I'm sorry to hear that you are reluctant to go to Argentina. Why is it so? I never imagined that you would act like a coward!'
>
> With tears in my eyes I explained to him that my reluctance was not caused by my cowardice but by the thought that I would have to leave Mahapurush Maharaj and other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.
>
> At this he became very grave and yet with great affection he said to me, 'That's even worse. It is selfishness! Haven't you ever thought how difficult it is for us to live without the physical presence of Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna)? You must carry His message to those who are thirsty there. You must carry His banner of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, *yoga* and selflessness. Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) in a spiritual vision saw the banner of Sri Ramakrishna flying on top of the Andes Mountains. You are very fortunate. Now you must give me your word that you will go there! Our blessings and good wishes will be always with you!'

PART II

SWAMI SUNIRMALANANDA

Brazil is one of the most beautiful countries of the world. Though almost twice the size of India, and much less than half as populated [about 170,000-,000], Brazil has one language and one culture. One language and one culture for such a vast country [8,547,404 km^2] should be one of the greatest surprises to the Indian. Imagine a small nation like India, full of confusion, quarrel and fights caused by variety. But in Brazil there is virtually no quarrel amongst different states over anything. People are peace-lovers, fun-lovers with their samba and carnaval, and work very hard to earn their living. The nation has a very liberal attitude towards everything — extremely liberal in everything, I stress. Though very rich in natural resources, many Brazilians suffer from poverty. Down south, we find a few rich states and rich people, but in the northern parts of Brazil, a vast majority of people live in poverty. Brazil is a hot country, quite as hot as some hot states of India. So far as religion is concerned, Brazil is a free nation — it allows all religions to practice here. But Brazil is predominantly Catholic [about 72% of the population is Catholic, at least for the register] and Evangelists are busy with their methods now.

Before Vedanta entered Brazil, Yoga had entered with a bang. Every block in advanced cities has a yoga school, and perhaps in no other country can we find post-graduation courses in Yoga like in Brazil. Many live on teaching yoga. There are universities teaching yoga — of course Hatha Yoga. Perhaps Brazil is the first country in the world to have celebrated 'Yoga Week' officially, with the government ordering this to be done. Then there were many gurus from India, who frequented, and are frequenting Brazil. Hare Krishna is well known in Brazil. They organize chariot festival in the most important road of São Paulo every year. Unfortunately, many negative ideals are entering fast too. The groups like Rajneesh etc. have gained popularity. However, it would be wrong to assume today that Brazilians, or South Americans in general, don't know anything about India, Indian culture, or Indian spirituality. Thanks to the Internet, and the several groups that visit Brazil, countless books have been translated and have gained popularity. Numerous films and movies have

crossed borders, and the educated people know about Sankhya, Yoga, and so on quite well.

Vedanta came to Brazil perhaps in silence. When Vivekananda went to the United States and participated in the parliament of religions in Chicago, it was entering with a bang. But here, it was entering in silence. Why silence? Because a great prophet like Vivekananda did not enter South America, and secondly, all literature that was available was in English. To the average Brazilian, like any South American, English is a challenge. South Americans are learning English with great interest and avidity now, but still the language spoken and cultivated is Portuguese in Brazil, and Spanish in other parts of South America. For this reason, not much of Vedanta could spread in Brazil initially.

However, during the beginning of the 20th century, it is learnt that some literature entered the land, and a few people were influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideals. A devotee by name Luiz Antonio has written a one-page history of Vedanta in Brazil, which was informative for the present writer.

When books by Romain Rolland and Christopher Isherwood on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda hit the stands in the western world, a few of them entered Brazil also. Thus a handful of Brazilians were aware and interested in Vedanta since the beginning of the previous century.

The advent of several religious and semi-religious groups into Brazil brought in some more information about Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Vedanta, and so on. For instance, the Theosophical Society and the Esoteric Society, etc. gave some people a little information about these things. Several people in the south of Brazil began to show keen interest in spiritual life. There were people who came to Brazil to work when the British ruled over India. They also brought in some very, very stray ideas about Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. But Brazilians had to be satisfied with different groups which taught ideas which were limiting in nature. Nothing concrete happened until 1957. Swami Tilak, a monk of an independent Order of India, visited Brazil several times and taught numerous people about Ramakrishna. He passed away, but his group is still alive and active in a few places.

Meanwhile, Swami Vijayananda came to South America in 1932. Born in 1898, Swami Vijayananda was a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, and he was destined to bring Vedanta to South America. Vijayananda stepped on the

soil of South America on 10 December 1932. Thus, with his coming in 1932, a centre of the Ramakrishna Order was founded in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Vijayananda played an active role in spreading the message of Vedanta in Argentina, and then in Brazil too. Not until 1957 did anything concrete happen in Brazil.

Some aspirants of Brazil, from the famous city Rio de Janeiro, contacted Swami Vijayananda and requested him to visit Brazil. This was the beginning of Vedanta in Brazil. When Swami Vijayananda visited Rio de Janeiro for the first time, several people joined together, welcomed him warmly and were inspired by his talks and discourses.

The following year Vijayananda was invited by a group in São Paulo also. This visit was more successful, because São Paulo was to become the centre of Vedanta Movement. Vijayananda gave initiation to some devotees and thus sowed the seeds of Vedanta in Brazil.

In 1959 there was another event to happen in another city in the south, called Belo Horizonte. An admirer of Ramakrishna, by name Prof. Arlindo Corrêa da Silva, wanted to do something for the poor and destitute children. He founded, without knowing about the Ramakrishna Mission in India, an institution which he called Mission Ramakrishna in a region called Betim, near Belo Horizonte. Prof. Silva worked hard to educate poor children, and he passed away in 1993. It is said that his work started with his having seen Swami Brahmananda in a vision. Even today this institution is growing from strength to strength, and the ideals of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda are being upheld by the dedicated workers there. They are in close touch with the centre of Ramakrishna in Belo Horizonte. Towards taking concrete steps in Vedanta in Rio de Janeiro, a group was formed, which was given the name 'Centro de Estudos Ramakrishna Vivekananda Vedanta.' Of the stalwarts of this group, one or two names could be mentioned: Cordelia de Jesus and Luiz Antonio. These devotees upheld the flag of Vedanta in spite of vicissitudes. Cordelia was so sacrificing that she donated her house for Vedanta and stayed elsewhere.

Meanwhile, a devotee broke away from the main group of Vedantins and started his own group in Rio de Janeiro. He passed away recently, but one of his group did some good job by translating — with limitations — the whole of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, printing it, and distributing it for free.

In 1959, a young man by name Victor Ruiz Pereira from another city by name Curitiba met Swami Vijayananda and sought initiation from him. He, his wife, and his daughter received initiation. Victor opened a bookshop to sell books on Vedanta, religion, etc. He did something extraordinary. He kept a box in his shop, seeking money to bring the Swami to Brazil. He would collect funds for this purpose. It was such dedication that helped start a group of devotees in Curitiba also.

Meanwhile, several young men and women of São Paulo sought initiation from Vijayananda, and a solid group was formed there also. But to form a group of Vedanta students in São Paulo took some time, though the young were visiting a teacher of piano, by name Djalme Augusto Gomes, in his house. He formed the centre of Vedanta and his house formed the Vedanta centre. Devotees would meet, invite Swami Vijayananda, and later, his successors, to Brazil. They would organize talks by the swamis and many would benefit from these talks. In 1974, the group in São Paulo finally decided to have a centre, and the Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama came into existence then. In 1979 yet another development took place with receipt as donation of a big piece of land in Embu Guaçu, near São Paulo. Today there stands a beautiful centre.

With this, the stage was set for the monks of the Ramakrishna Order to visit more frequently. Thus, apart from Swami Vijayananda, his successors Swami Paratparananda and Swami Pareshananda started visiting Brazil every year, and also started staying for longer periods of time. Not only monks, several nuns of the Sarada Math too visited Brazil. Amongst the monks who left lasting impression was Swami Ritajananda, from France, who initiated many devotees in Brazil. Thus gradually the number of devotees kept on increasing with time. Swami Bhaskarananda of Seattle is yet another monk who visits Brazil often and inspires the devotees.

The devotees from all the four places began to feel the need of a centre of the Order in Brazil. With the centre in Argentina flourishing well, a centre in Brazil, especially in São Paulo, was also needed. With this need in view, the devotees started working towards this end. Soon they applied to the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission for a monk. Meanwhile, the Ramakrishna Order got a wonderful young man, the first ever from South America, as a novice. Today known as Swami Arunananda,

he is the first Brazilian, and the first of the whole South America, to become a monk.

On 1 April 1999, the Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama of São Paulo was officially affiliated to the Ramakrishna Order. The Order sent Swami Nirmalatmananda as the first ever resident monk of Brazil, and thus the Order had laid firm foundations. One other important event was the visit of the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order to Brazil and Argentina in 2002. This was the first-ever visit of one of the Trustees of the Ramakrishna Order to Brazil. This brought immense interest in Vedanta in Brazil. In all, about 250 devotees in all of Brazil have been initiated. Soon the other three cities became active and now, Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, and Rio de Janeiro have their own buildings, temples, etc. In March 2006 these three centres became the sub-centres of the São Paulo Ashrama. The work is growing steadily, with little groups from other cities like Receife etc. inviting monks and arranging for talks. There is great hope for work in Brazil.

References

1 *Global Vedanta*, Summer, 2001, Vol. VI, No. 3, p. 14; and Summer 2002, p. 16.

2 Ibid., Fall 2004, Vol. IX, No. 4, 14.

3 Ibid., Winter 2001, Vol. VI, No. 1, p 15.

4 Ibid., Fall 2003, Vol. VIII, No. 4, 14.

5 Ibid., Fall 2004, Vol. IX, No. 4, p. 14.

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7 Ibid., Winter 2002-2003, Vol. VIII, No. 1.

Ramakrishna Movement in Europe
ENGLAND, FRANCE, SWITZERLAND, HOLLAND, POLAND, BULGARIA, AND GREECE*

ARCHIE AND ELEANOR STARK

England

ALTHOUGH THE SPREAD of Vedanta in England and Europe cannot strictly be called the direct result of the Chicago Parliament of Religions and of the brilliant success of Vivekananda at that seminal event, there is no doubt that it was the beginning of a dynamic message from the East to the West, not only to America but to England and the Continent. We shall briefly examine what has happened in the last one hundred years since that vibrant spiritual message was gifted to mankind.

In spite of the fact that Vivekananda spent in all a little over a year and a half in England and Europe, we shall discover that such a dynamic prophet had only to pass by or even stay for a few weeks or months, to leave behind a stirring of new life for the spirit. Those who were yearning for something in their lives could deeply feel an assurance, and even catch a glimpse, of wider horizons in the life of the spirit. Vivekananda gave them hope and direction and the sense that there was, indeed, a great purpose to life.

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* Reproduced (after updating) from *The Vedanta Kesari*, February, March, April 1994, 'Vivekananda's Impact on England and Europe' by Archie and Eleanor Stark.

Vivekananda spent in all five and a half years in the West, his triumphal return to India for two and a half years sandwiched between his two visits to the West. In India his fame had gone before him, and he was inundated by roaring crowds everywhere he went. To his own countrymen he gave Ramakrishna's message with a strong mind and a full heart, while at the same time beginning to plan for some kind of organization with the help of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, in order to gather and preserve the passing on of his Master's life and thought, and his own 'Vedanta' for the future.

During Vivekananda's first visit to America, after staying there for about two and a half years, he came to England first in mid 1895. He stayed there for about eleven weeks and returned to America in November 1895. Later he made a visit to the Continent to get some rest in the summer of 1896 (in the company of Captain and Mrs. Sevier and Miss Müller, to Geneva, the French Alps, Switzerland and, and on the way back, through Germany and Holland) and returned to England for a stay of some three months.

Again his success was great; there were many classes and lectures arranged, as he was well known now from his first visit. An *Indian National* article states that Swami Vivekananda and Mr. K. S. Ranjit Singh were the most outstanding people in England — Vivekananda, for his illuminating spiritual instruction; and Ranjit Singh, the young Rajput chief, for his unbeatable cricket ability; he was the best bat in England! According to Sister Gargi (*Swami Vivekananda in the West — New Discoveries*, 4:282.):

> In no time at all, and with very little effort on his part, London opened to Swamiji. The Anglican Church, the Free Thinkers, the Radicals, as represented by Miss Müller's family, the Scientists of the Balloon Society, Her Majesty's Government, as represented by at least one high-ranking official; Orientalists and scholars — all were his. There was no one in London who would hesitate to attend his classes lest to do so be somehow not quite proper; no door in the city was closed to him. In short, as generally happened in the course of his Western mission, the way opened at every turning, and he simply strode along.

Sister Gargi also speaks of the time Swamiji, sitting quietly with a group in an English home, made the following remarkable revelation of his place in history (Ibid., 142):

> I will have a lot of difficult work to do in this life. Compared with last time, there is much more to be done. This time I will work up to the very last moment! I have just begun my work; in America I have raised only one or two waves: a tidal wave must be raised, society must be turned upside down, world must be given a new civilization. The world will understand what that Power is and why I have come. Compared with the power showed last time, it will be tremendous.

Right after this deeply serious and quiet statement, Swamiji went out and continued his many practice sessions learning to ride a bicycle.

A highlight of Swamiji's stay in England was his meeting with the great German Indologist, Max Müller, who had lived in Oxford for over fifty years, although he had been born in Germany and had studied there. Above all, he had translated and edited the Vedas in six volumes and later had edited the fifty-volume *Sacred Books of the East.* Swamiji later said of Max Müller, '...his heartbeats have caught the rhythm of the Upanishads.'

In his paper given at a recent conference at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Buckinghamshire, Swami Tripurananda wrote (Swami Tripurananda, paper on *The Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, England* — unpublished):

> ...It was during these months that Swamiji gave his monumental lectures on *Jñāna-Yoga* and *Practical Vedanta.* It is impossible to evaluate Vivekananda's legacy in England. It may well be another two hundred years before we begin to assess what it was he gave the country. His ideas today are germinating, bringing culture and peoples together as never before. It was a period when the map of Europe was redrawn; cultures were shaken up and this enabled Swamiji's legacy to take root in a soil that, whilst manured with a fertile literary tradition, was largely free of incrustations.

Two qualities that were strong in Vivekananda were his deep compassion and his adamantine will. Gargi tells of one incident to illustrate his anguish for all those suffering in the world. The news in the morning papers would sometimes lead to discussion. His English friends had much to say about the barbarous condition in Russia where 2,000 peasants had died crushed, trampled, and shot at by overwrought police. They intimated that it was different from the civilized and orderly conditions in England. 'But Swamiji remained silent,

grave. Then suddenly he exclaimed, "What misery! What suffering!" And he began to walk the floor, his eyes deep with sorrow.'

An example of his strength is found in this incident when Swamiji introduced his brother disciple, Swami Abhedananda, to the English people after having coached him for some time. It was time for the new Swami to give his first talk, but he said:

> 'You know, Naren, I don't think I will speak this afternoon. Some other time...' And Swamiji, who was a good deal more strongly built than Swami Abhedananda, replied fiercely, 'Kali, you *must* speak or I will throw you out of that window!'

The young Swami spoke and was a success. Swamiji's joy was unbounded.

It was in England that Vivekananda gave his famous lectures on Maya. He felt that his profound message would be accepted there and needed to be given as his time was short and he wanted to plant the seed of the meaning of life, which would sprout in many minds and grow to understanding.

The very fact that Swamiji was giving the high truth to people whose lives, as far as we can know, were closely woven into the world's social fabric — housewives, educators, nurses, men of various professions, women campaigning for the right to take part in the life outside the home, men attempting to better the world — the very fact that he was pouring out the highest of Vedantic teaching to such men and women was clear evidence of his conviction that the highest truth could be put into practice and realized by everyone with a yearning for it in all possible conditions of life. In his view, no man or woman was ordinary; no one was less than divine, and there was no one who should not be told so.

We shall briefly quote from one of his 'Maya' lectures to show that Swamiji was fearless in his presentation:

> The whole world is going towards death; everything dies. All our progress, our vanities, our reforms, our luxuries, our wealth, our knowledge, have that one end — death. That is all that is certain. Cities come and go, empires rise and fall, planets break into pieces and crumble into dust, to be blown about by the atmospheres of other planets. Thus it has been going on from time without beginning. Death is the end of everything. Death is the

> end of life, of beauty, of wealth, of power, of virtue, too. Saints die and sinners die, kings die and beggars die. They are all going to death, and yet this tremendous clinging on to life exists. Somehow, we do not know why, we cling to life; we cannot give it up. And this is Maya.

'In each of his three lectures on Maya, Swamiji stressed this point, perhaps knowing that to hear it from his lips was equivalent to learning it the slow hard way over hundreds, thousands of lifetimes. His lectures, particularly his classes, were often hammer blows, breakers of bondage. He would repeat an unaccustomed or unpalatable idea again and again, never in quite the same way. He would suddenly digress, perhaps to break too great a tension, perhaps to impress an important thought upon minds grown concentrated and receptive.

'Reading his lectures, one may sometimes lose one's way, but his listeners, caught up in the atmosphere of freedom that surrounded him, were — or could be — free. "You must bear in mind", he said to them, "that I have to tell you the facts that will frighten you sometimes, but if you remember what I say, think of it and digest it, it will be yours; it will raise you higher and make you capable of understanding and living in truth"' (*New Discoveries*, 4:359).

Although we have touched only too briefly on Swamiji's work in England, in his letter written from England to an American devotee we can get a glimpse into his power of thought:

> This British Empire with all its drawbacks is the greatest machine that ever existed for the dissemination of ideas, and I mean to put my ideas in the centre of this machine and they will spread all over the world (Ibid., 519).

One of Swamiji's regular class members in England said, 'Since I heard the Swami, light has flooded into religion. It is real; it lives; it has a new glad meaning and is altogether transformed for' (Ibid., 367).

We have paused here to give you a small glimpse of some of the themes and expressions that Swamiji gave in England in order to show you how, even in so short a time, Vivekananda made a deep impression on England. And we remind you that it was in England that he 'mined his jewels' — a few disciples who gave up everything to follow him and to help him: Captain and Mrs. Sevier who eventually built the Ashrama at Mayavati in sight of the Himalayas

that he had dreamed of; Margaret Noble, later Sister Nivedita, who gave her life as a 'lioness' on behalf of Indian women; and 'my faithful Goodwin', a young Englishman who found Swamiji in New York and became invaluable to him in transcribing his lectures and classes in both America and England. They all died in India (except Mrs. Sevier, who passed away in England in 1927), having found their spiritual home in the service to man as God in the name of Vivekananda who had inspired them.

Leaving the West for the last time to return to his own native land, Vivekananda said while passing through Europe that the Continent was an 'armed camp and smelled of war'. He stopped for few days in Constantinople, and one is reminded that this historic city was, and is, the meeting place of the East and the West. Who else could better symbolize this but Vivekananda?

In the two decades after the departure of Swamiji, the preparing for and the waging of a wide-spread World War disrupted society and embroiled, in its negative and alienating force, most of the Western world. It is interesting to note that World War I has now become history, and even scholars look at the events of that war with all the dispassion and objectivity that were so badly needed at the time. We need, once again, as we live through today's 'history', a spiritual outlook of such magnitude that we will be 'armed' with love and dispassion at the very time that the world is in tumult.

So, one could say that for a generation after Vivekananda left this world for the peace of Infinite, that great voice seemed to have died to a murmur amid the disruptions and battles that continued and erupted again, this time on a worldwide scale. But that memorable voice was silently cherished in the hearts and minds of those who had heard and treasured the great gift to humanity Vivekananda had left to the world.

It was not until 1934 that a swami from Belur Math was sent to England. His name was Swami Avyaktananda. He conducted meetings in the homes of friends and also travelled to many places in England. However, he gave up his ties with the Ramakrishna Order when he and his group began advocating a non-violent social revolution all over the world and preached that constructive elements of the capitalist and communist social systems had to be combined on a spiritual foundation. This was an ideal, to be sure, but such a political stance was not in accord with the principles of the Order. The Swami resigned, but maintained his spiritual ties with the Order until his death in England.

In 1949 Swami Ghanananda was asked to assume the leadership of the Vedanta work in England. As the work began to build up under the new Swami, a bimonthly magazine, *Vedanta for the East and the West*, was started in September 1951; a number of books also were published, and eventually a large house was purchased at 54 Holland Park in London. The Swami retired from active life in August 1969 and later passed away in the month of November of the same year.

Swami Bhavyananda then arrived in London in 1969 and became the head of the Centre. By 1977 he was able to purchase a place out of the congested city and into an estate at Bourne End Buckinghamshire in the Thames Valley. There Vedanta broadened and deepened with Sunday lectures, a large bookshop, beautiful grounds and room for retreatants, especially for the two weekly retreats every year with a visiting swami. Swami Bhavyananda lectured to many groups and educational institutions, travelled to many countries with the message of Vedanta, and participated in spiritual retreats in both Europe and America.

Swami Tripurananda, one of the boys from the Centre when it was in London, and a former Quaker, is now the 'Manager Maharaj' at Bourne End. Swami Dayatmananda arrived from India in March 1991 to assist Swami Bhavyananda. He was appointed as the head of the Centre in January 1994 after the latter's passing away in December 1993. Swami Tripurananda says:

> In all ways the work in England continues to expand even though our membership is small... We do not make any great show of our influence, neither does any sense of charisma cling to our members. Swami Vivekananda compared Vedanta to the early morning dew, coming unseen and unheard, yet bringing into bloom the finest of flowers. So are a nation's sensibilities changed, and so does her mind expand.

France

Swami Yatiswarananda was invited to Paris in 1936 to participate in a celebration to commemorate Sri Ramakrishna's birth centenary. Here the seed was planted for a Vedanta Ashrama in France. During this Sorbonne celebration, Jean Herbert (an internationally known interpreter drawn to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda) and a few other friends, requested Swami Yatiswarananda to

help them secure a swami of the Ramakrishna Order for the sake of France. The swami wrote to Belur Math, asking that Swami Siddheswarananda, a brother disciple, be sent. The Math agreed and Swami Siddheswarananda arrived in Paris in the July of 1937. He stayed with a French couple, the Sautons, 'who remained loyal to him until their last'. Mr. Sauton translated into French many Vedanta works, including a biography of Holy Mother.

However, as the Germans began overwhelming France, the Swami moved to Montpellier in the south of France and began to lecture at the University of Toulouse, also at Marseilles, Nimes, and other places.

Let us pause here to give, in the words of Swami Amarananda, the wonderful story of the young man, Mercel, who tutored Swami Siddheswarananda in the French language while the Swami was still in Paris:

> In 1929 Mercel, then a young man, was sent by a firm... to the Far East to search for its commercial prospects. In Saigon, one rainy day, he casually... came across Rolland's books on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. He bought the books and finished reading them soon. His whole mind had already been metamorphosed. He wrote back to his wife in Paris: 'The commercial voyage which has brought me to this part of the world may or may not be a success; that matters little, but I have found the saving anchor for my soul. I send you herewith the books which have opened a new horizon for both of us!' Eight years after, Mercel became the tutor of the French language to Swami Siddheswarananda.

After the War, and the loss of Mr. Sauton to cancer, Swami Siddheswarananda returned to Paris. Mr. Sautons' demise was a shock to the Swami, who later publicly declared that 'the Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna had lost in him a true friend, an energetic collaborator and, above all, a saintly man whose last moments of earthly life were blessed with the intuition received directly from Holy Mother.' Very soon after that, another 'by chance' event occurred. A wealthy lady, a disciple of Swami Akhilananda, came to the Swami with a proposal. She was dying of cancer and wanted to sell her house in Paris and donate the money to the 'Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna' so that the Centre could buy a large piece of land in the country to relocate. The offer was accepted and a place was found with much land and a small château on it in the village of Gretz in the valley of Seine-et-Marne, about 30 kilometers

southeast of Paris. Much work needed to be done on the château, which had been occupied by the Nazis during the War. Swami Siddheswarananda, on one of his inspection tours to the would-be Gretz Ashrama, whispered to a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, 'How to make Ramakrishna permeate the pores of every brick in this building?'

The founding of this Ashrama was considered a crowning achievement of Swami Siddheswarananda. During his twenty years of ministry, he lectured at the Sorbonne University on Vedanta, gathered many devoted followers at the Ashrama, and welcomed many distinguished scholars and spiritual leaders there. There was a whole series of translations and compositions on India and her saints (fifteen volumes totally). The Swami found the remarkable concordance between Indian thought and the spiritual thought of Europe, especially that of Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross, two great mystics of Spain, and also Meister Eckhart of Germany.

After his second heart attack, the Swami, then 57, passed away at Gretz in April 1957, leaving his devotees in a state of shock. He was loved by all. On a walk, for example, he would meet a gendarme and stop to talk with him, and that gendarme was 'his' forever, right from that moment; there was the spiritual

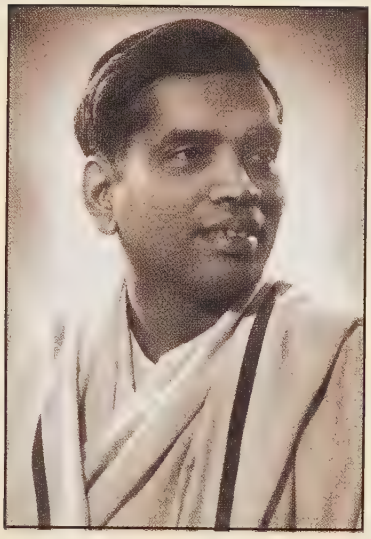
dynamism and the grace of the Guru working through the life of Swami Siddheswarananda that all who knew him felt vividly.

With the death of Swami Siddheswarananda, the shock to Mamaji (Mme. Sauton) and the devotees at Gretz was great. This caused them to refuse a replacement swami of the Order. This situation illustrates an oft-repeated problem of human nature — strong identification with a leader rather than absorption of the eternal and infinite message. As Swamiji once said, with heart-piercing pathos, 'We infinite dreamers, dreaming finite dreams!'

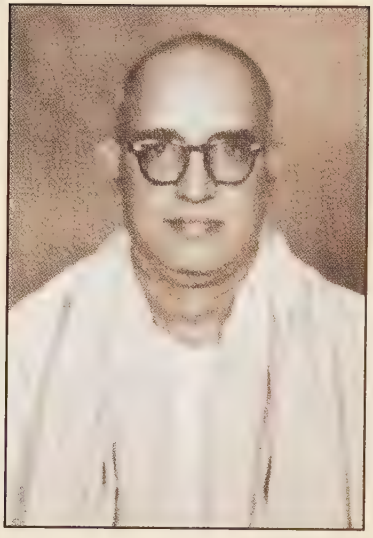
With the rejection of any swami of the Order, practically all work of the Vedanta Centre at Gretz stopped. Thus, by the beginning of 1962, the Gretz Centre was non-functional. Visitors no longer came, there was no income, and there were not enough people to care for the work of the house, garden and animals. Finally, an agreement was reached by which the women of the Ashrama would be paid for their share of the investment in the Ashrama and would then leave. With the help of Swami Yatiswarananda, the Order called on Swami Prabhavananda to release his assistant Swami Ritajananda for the work at Gretz. Swami Ritajananda arrived at Gretz in 1962 to find a non-functioning Ashrama, language problem, and no support because the few people who stayed were completely opposed to him.

This story we heard him recount in an informal talk: 'I had to call Swami Prabhavananda in Los Angeles to tell him how bad it was at my Ashrama. The Swami in California used only a few words to reply, "Whose Ashrama?"' That very afternoon came one of the first boys to help him! As Kurt Friedrichs, who knew the whole situation, has said in his paper: 'This was a very difficult time for Swami Ritajananda, and the people who come to the Centre nowadays realize that the Swami brought about a miracle.' Of course, the Swami would say, 'Whose miracle?'

In those early days Swami Ritajananda often visited his friends at the Vedanta Centres in Wiesbaden, Hamburg, and southern Germany. Meetings were held every few months with the 'French' Swami, who gave his talks in English, which was understood by most. Eventually the Wiesbaden Centre broke up, and Frau Kuebesch, a devotee of the Swami, gave her place in Fulda, near the East-West German border, for continued meetings. At last, so many were coming that a large place had to be found in Bad Neuheim, which continues to the present.



Swami Siddheswarananda



Swami Ritajananda

Swami Yatiswarananda

Swami Ghanananda

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, UK

Swami Ranganathananda with Prof. Jo Von Orshoven and his family in Holland, in 1982

Vedanta Gesellschaft, Bindweide, Germany

Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna, Gretz

While we are speaking of Germany for the moment, we should mention that there are many groups in Germany, in different places — some registered, some not. However, there was no Central Society for a long time. It was only in December 2004 that the Vedanta Society in Bindweide was affiliated to the Order, which today guides all the Vedanta groups in Germany. Before this the swamis of the Order used to go to many of these places and thus kept the Vedanta work going.

Anyhow, to continue with France, in May 1990 Swami Veetamohananda was sent from India to assist Swami Ritajananda. Swami Ritajananda, however, passed away on 22 January 1994. Over the last few decades, he had consolidated the Ashrama at Gretz, and today the Centre exerts a wide influence over most of the Continent. His gentle manners and his constant accent on the development of the inner life created an atmosphere here in Gretz very much like an Indian Ashrama. The devotees from various countries who flock at the Ashrama continue to create a nice atmosphere of internationalism. Wherever Swami Ritajananda travelled and talked or conducted retreats, there came later to the Gretz Ashrama an influx of people of that country, such as the Spaniards, Italians, Germans, Dutch, etc.

After the passing away of Swami Ritajananda, Swami Veetamohananda became the head of the Centre in March 1994. He is being assisted in his work by Swamis Devatmananda and Gangananda. In October 1997, the Centre celebrated the centenary of Ramakrishna Mission and the 60th anniversary of Vedanta in France. Talks on Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Vedanta by noted persons, a discussion on Buddhism and Vedanta, and an attractive musical programme were organized. Besides, a video prepared by the members of the Ashrama, illustrating the ideals and history of the Centre, was projected, and a special issue of the Ashrama's magazine *Vedanta* brought out on the occasion was released.

The Gretz Ashrama now finds itself inundated at times with many devotees. Over the years, the Ashrama at Gretz has met the test of time and has fulfilled Swami Siddheswarananda's hope that 'Ramakrishna would permeate the pores of every brick in building.' Swami Amarananda writes that fifty years (now 68 years, i.e. 1937-2005) of the Centre Vedantique in France is ample proof of the depth and vastness of the Power whom the Swami called 'Ramakrishna'.

Switzerland

In Geneva, Switzerland, an organization calling itself 'Centre Vedantique' was begun by Swami Nityabodhananda in 1958. His fine grip of the French language and literature helped him consolidate the Centre. Apart from the popular classes given by him at the Geneva Centre, he gave lectures in various universities of Western Europe and at Yoga and Vedanta groups. The Swami's books in French and his active contacts with many outstanding ecumenical groups are a tribute to his work.

In November of 1972, the Centre Vedantique was transferred from the city to its large and beautiful chalet-type house overlooking Lake Geneva. We know that Swami Vivekananda had stayed in the Alpine Village of Sass-Fee and there he had first conceived of a Himalayan monastery to be a meeting place for both his Eastern and Western devotees (which, as we know, was later built by his faithful disciples, Capt. and Mrs. Sevier). Because of Swamiji's association, and because of the fact that Jean Herbert held the chair of Oriental Mythology in Geneva University from 1954 to 1964, it seems that this Centre of the Ramakrishna Order in Switzerland has great potentialities. Since the severe illness of Swami Nityabodhananda, Swami Amarananda, who had first gone as assistant to the Gretz Ashrama, was posted to Geneva to help the Swami and eventually return him to India.

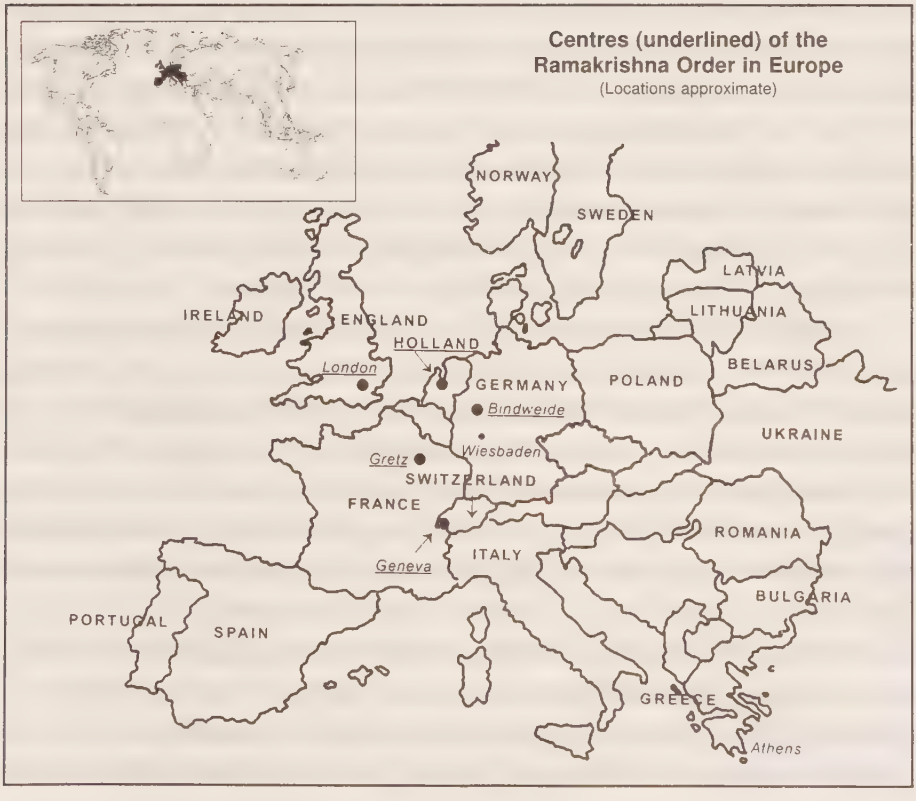
Since then Swami Amarananda has been managing the Geneva Centre with sincere and sturdy devotion. He has also travelled, lecturing, giving classes, and writing, and at the same time has conducted the programme of the Centre. The Centre later moved to its newly acquired premises in July 1999.

Holland

Swami Chidbhasananda, who was posted to Holland in May 1990, had noted that Holland has always been a home of religion and philosophy as seen by the mystics, philosophers and saints like Thomas à Kempis, Spinoza, and Ruysbroeck. He also noted that Swami Atulananda (Gurudas Maharaj), a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, was born in Amsterdam and was well known for his high spiritual attainments. Swami Siddheswarananda, on a visit to Holland, made the remark that 'Holland is a fertile field for the working out of Vedanta.'

Swami Chidbhasananda had further noted that, 'Holland is definitely within the framework of the divine master plan of Swamiji, as, when writing about Paul Deussen, he says, "It will always be among the most pleasing episodes in my life — my first visit to this ardent Vedantist at Kiel... and our travelling together through Germany and Holland to London, and the pleasant meetings we had in and about London..."' Needless to say, having been blessed by the holy presence of Swamiji, Holland has already come within the structure of the Vedanta Movement.

A disciple of Swamiji in Switzerland went to Belur Math in 1913 in quest of knowledge and, on his return, published a book titled *The Message of Sri Ramakrisna*. Later he translated into Dutch Romain Rolland's books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. In a way, these can be called significant milestones on the progress of the Vedanta Movement in Holland. The Theosophical Society also published a Dutch translation of Swami Abhedananda's book *The Power of the Mind*.



Swami Yatiswarananda had to leave Europe because of World War II, and so the movement naturally received a setback. The Swami returned in 1950 when he initiated some earnest seekers, one of them being a Mr. Ter Laan. The family of Mr. Ter Laan used to organize retreats at their house, being able to provide board and lodging for about 70 persons. Up to then, there had been no organization, all being done in their individual capacities.

The second phase of the development was the invitation of Dr. Rama Poulderman to Swami Ranganathananda to come to Holland. His visits became yearly, starting in 1961, and were under the auspices of the Dutch Hatha Yoga Foundation. The Swami used to stay with the family of Professor Jo Von Orshaven in the charming little town of Assendelft. Jo's wife, Harma, and their three little boys — Naren, Rakhal, and Tarak, now grown up — provided accommodation for the Swami, and made visiting groups feel at home.

Due to the scattering of groups here and there, it became necessary to begin thinking of a unified Ramakrishna Society with its headquarters in Amsterdam. Thus, inspired by and under the guidance of Swami Ranganathananda, the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of the Netherlands was founded on 12 March 1986 on the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. This auspicious event was celebrated with the worship of Sri Ramakrishna at the home of Jo Von Orshaven, Swami Ambananda of Gretz performing the *pūjā*. Later the centre was affiliated to the Order in 1990 and Swami Chidbhasananda arrived in late May of that year to take up residence in Amsterdam.

A larger house was later found, and the Netherlands Centre set off to a good start. Whatever difficulties arose out of so many groups with dynamic leaders were smoothened out, and everyone eventually came together in the spirit of oneness that was gifted by Vivekananda. Many swamis of the Order have visited the Centre, conducted retreats, and given lectures. Swami Chidbhasananda was a loving person, quiet and composed. Swami Sarvatmananda succeeded him as the head of the Centre in July 2000. Swami Chidbhasananda later passed away in India on 5 May 2001 at the age of 68.

The Centre is housed in a fair size condominium that has a shrine, library and reading room, a small bookstore, and a living room that also serves as a lecture hall. The Centre holds regular weekly talks and discourses for the public, and daily worship and morning and evening prayers are held at the shrine. It

also observes the festivals of the Ramakrishna Order and publishes a bi-annual journal named *Vedanta*.

Poland

Swami Yatiswarananda came to Poland in 1934 to participate in the Congress of Moral Education, where he delivered two lectures. He was the guest of Antonina Cieszynska and her husband in their small Warsaw flat. Antonina Cieszynska used to read *Kali the Mother*, her favourite book by Nivedita, while going to work by tram. She translated into Polish the first volume of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and also the *Inspired Talks* by Vivekananda. Much of the early Polish correspondence on Vedanta ideas was destroyed by World War II bombardment. In the Warsaw uprising of 1944, her home ceased to exist.

In a letter dated 1970, she wrote, 'And in this way... our Mysterious Mother of God, Maya, is playing with us in Her own way. Ramakrishna, who called himself Her child and who, like a real child, talked freely with Her, even reproaching Her repeatedly, and tormented Her with his demands (always on behalf of his devotees), is for me alive and present forever.'

It is worth mentioning that after the war, in one of the industrial plants near her place of residence, some Hindu students were doing their holiday training. In view of her knowledge of English, she was asked to act as interpreter and lecturer. What a chance for the Hindu students to listen to lectures on Vedanta, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in a remote corner of Poland!

In 1991 Swami Bhavyananda made his third visit to Poland. He wrote: 'The country is poverty stricken. Seven million Poles and seven million Jews were killed in Poland. Pollution is heavy. Drunkenness is a national problem. What is the way out? God alone knows.' There is no doubt that the strong message of Vivekananda is very much needed to rouse the people from their apathy to shape their own destiny.

Swami Bhavyananda made some personal contacts there, was treated kindly by everyone, gave introductory talks on Vedanta to small groups, had a lot of discussion on the future of the country and the role of youth. Some Vedanta publications are being translated into Polish. According to Swami

Bhavyananda, in Poland 'there is a lot of potential to strengthen the spiritual aspirations of the people.'

Bulgaria

Swami Veetamohananda of the Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna in France has made several trips to Bulgaria, made possible by Elsa Busch of Berlin, who had made contact with two Bulgarian disciples of Swami Ritajananda. Swami Veetamohananda and Elsa Busch went to Sophia, Bulgaria, on a seven-day trip. There were about 100 people who responded to the Swami's first lecture.

In 1992, the Swami visited two locations, viz. Sophia and Bourgas on the Black Sea. There was more interest in his second lecture with about 150 to 200 people attending. During the third visit, there was a short TV interview and news items about the lectures. Already some Bulgarians had been meeting in Hatha Yoga groups. On the third visit, groups were set up for a study of Vivekananda. A group of ten will publish a small book on Vivekananda in the Bulgarian language.

Greece

In the capital city of Athens there is a group of devotees deeply interested in Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna. The group is led by Mr John Manetta, in whose house the devotees meet every week. In John's house a shrine has been consecrated to Sri Ramakrishna. They read scriptures, sing devotional songs and conduct question-answer sessions when occasionally a swami of the Ramakrishna Order visits them. Mr John has done the monumental work of translating ten books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda into Greek. However, formalization of this Vedanta Society has not taken place yet.

Ramakrishna Movement in Europe

GERMANY*

KURT FRIEDRICHS

In the middle of the eighteenth century, French orientalists translated from the Persian language fragments of Hindu philosophy under the title *Oupnek'hat*. This became known also in Germany, and two poets of the romantic period, Schlegel and Tieck, made its German translations. Both of them were well suited for this purpose because they had already translated Cervantes and Shakespeare with great success. The German texts circulated among the intellectuals and in the universities. Thus Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) came to know of the Upaniṣads, and through them came into contact with Indian philosophy. In his main work *The World as Will and Idea*, the influence of Vedanta is tangible. Schopenhauer later said about the Upaniṣads: 'It has been the solace of my life, and it will be the solace of my death.'

His great admirer was Paul Deussen, another great teacher of philosophy. Paul Deussen (1845-1919), like Schopenhauer, was fascinated by the large treasures lying in Indian scriptures. He studied Sanskrit, became an Indologist and an important exponent of Indian philosophy in Germany and in the West. In 1882 he published a book *Representation of the Vedanta*. In 1884, the university of Kiel, where he was lecturing, published a series, *History of Philosophy in Respect to Religions*, to which Deussen contributed a volume

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* Reproduced (after minor changes, additions, and updating the matter) from *Prabuddha Bharata*, January 1983, 'Vedanta in Germany' by Kurt Friedrich.

treating the philosophy of the Vedas up to the Upaniṣads. Then he became very busy with translations, and in 1897 appeared his important book *Sixty Upaniṣads of the Veda*. In the winter of 1892-93 he travelled throughout India giving lectures in many places in English as well as in Sanskrit on the Vedanta and the other systems. His impressions of this tour he later described in a book *Memories of India*.

In 1896 Paul Deussen learned that Swami Vivekananda had come to England, and invited him to visit Kiel. After a short stay at this university town, he accompanied the Swami back to London. We do not know much about the meeting of these two souls, but we may be sure that from Vivekananda's dynamic personality Deussen got a lot of inspiration, spiritually as well as philosophically. In 1908 he published a volume *The Post-Vedic Philosophy of the Indians* containing a detailed exposition of the six *darśanas*, especially Shankara's Advaita Vedanta. In 1911 Deussen founded the Schopenhauer Society and, at the same time, started giving lectures on 'Elements of Metaphysics', in which he tried to produce a counterweight against the materialistic attitude of the natural sciences of his days.

From Deussen up to Professor Helmuth von Glasenapp, German Indologists did a wonderful work in translation and exposition, so that most of the Hindu scriptures, including the *Bhagavad Gita*, became available to German readers. However, all these achievements were on the intellectual side and were restricted to academic circles. The bread of life contained in Vedanta was not available to the common people. There was none to give spiritual guidance in the actual living of Vedantic truths.

Wolfram Koch, a wealthy German, was living in Wiesbaden, a small town in the Rhineland of West Germany. He was well versed in several languages and had studied mysticism. He was also a writer and was much interested in Hindu philosophy. The intellectual talks of the professors at the universities on theology and Indology did not satisfy him. He wanted to see a living example of realization, a teacher who could harmonize daily life and spirituality. Accordingly, he wrote to Belur Math to send a swami to Germany.[1] He had read about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and was convinced that the time was ripe to spread the message of Vedanta in Germany. His several letters remained unanswered by the Math. Finally, he became impatient and wrote that the efforts of Vivekananda at the Chicago Parliament of Religions,

his work in America and England, his acquaintance with Max Müller and Paul Deussen and many other scholars and thinkers of the time, were all useless if the Order was not doing anything to make Vedanta known in Europe. By this time the Math had received assurances that Mr. Koch would pay all of swami's expenses and also get a rented house for a Vedanta Centre in Wiesbaden. Belur Math agreed, and the choice fell on Swami Yatiswarananda, who was then serving as the president of the Ramakrishna Math, Madras. The Swami gladly accepted as, strangely enough, he had just had a dream of his Guru, Swami Brahmananda, asking him, 'What about Thakur's work in Europe?' Thus, the yearning letter, the dream of Swami Yatiswarananda, and the assurances of Mr. Koch to take on the expenses of the Swami at Wiesbaden, combined to make the first Vedanta group in Europe.

In October 1933 Swami Yatiswarananda arrived by ship at Genoa, where Mr. Koch was waiting for him, and they drove up by car to Wiesbaden. Mr. Koch had rented a house where the Swami could live by himself, prepare his own food and create his own atmosphere. The Swami started his work immediately, and his first classes were on M's *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Later followed classes on Swami Brahmananda's *Spiritual Teachings* and readings from the *Bhagavad Gita*. From the beginning of 1934, Swami Yatiswarananda gave a long series of talks on 'The Spiritual Path' and, in between, continued his classes for small groups on Hindu scriptures. Besides these talks, Swami Yatiswarananda gave interviews and spiritual instruction to a number of sincere spiritual aspirants.

This work went on without interruption for two years. But by 1935 the Hitler regime had established itself firmly, and now turned against all religious sects and movements. Meetings had to be notified, and spirituality became suspect. Therefore Wolfram Koch decided to move to St. Moritz in Switzerland, where he had a house 'Crusaida'. There a new Vedanta study-group was founded, and devotees from different parts of Europe started gathering there. But in the meantime the message had spread, and Swami Yatiswarananda had to travel a lot to see his old disciples in Germany and Vedanta students in France, Holland, Denmark, and Sweden. He lectured at the Sorbonne in Paris on Vedanta, and arranged for Swami Siddheswarananda's coming to Paris in 1937, who established the 'Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna' there. From 1937 a journal *Vedanta* was published every three months in St. Moritz, in which

not only the wisdom of the Vedas and Upaniṣads and other Hindu scriptures, but also the teachings of Christian and Sufi mystics found their place. The journal was published in English, but Mr. Koch and his friends also made a German translation, which was sent to all devotees who did not understand enough English. Swami Yatiswarananda had said from the beginning: 'I have not enough time to learn German, so you all had better learn some English.' All the lectures, readings and class talks were preserved by some devotees, and they are still a treasury of spiritual inspiration. Through the influence of the Swami, publishers in Switzerland and Germany became interested, and during 1936 and 1937 — partly with the financial help of Josephine MacLeod — Swami Vivekananda's four Yogas were published in German and also *The Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* and Romain Rolland's two books *The Life of Ramakrishna* and *The Life of Vivekananda*.

The political situation in Europe became worse and, finding that the war was imminent, Swami Yatiswarananda left Germany and Switzerland under his British passport. He stayed during the summer of 1939 in Sweden with devotees in Stockholm, and sailed from Bergen for New York just a few days before World War II broke out.

The German Vedantins, being without a swami now, continued the work, led by the artist Otto Ritschl. Ritschl was an abstract painter, but the Nazis had forbidden him to paint, and so he had to take a job with the tax-office to survive. Meetings and classes were going on, but the group became small, some dropping away, some killed by bombs. Nevertheless, during the whole War period the work never completely stopped. When the War was over in 1945, most devotees had lost all their property. Ritschl's studio was destroyed, but his library and all the records of Swami Yatiswarananda's teachings were undamaged. So the small group in Wiesbaden started to work again under very difficult conditions. There was no heating, no food, and no transport. But it was a time when spirituality had its biggest chance to get hold of the people. As soon as the mail-service started working again, Swami Yatiswarananda, who had opened a Vedanta Centre at Philadelphia in the United States, got in touch with his disciples in Wiesbaden. He arranged with his American friends and devotees to send food parcels and other gifts to ease the situation of his German followers. He even sent paint and brushes to Otto Ritschl so that he could paint again.

In the summer of 1949, the news spread that Swami Yatiswarananda, on his way back to India, would come to Wiesbaden to meet his old friends and disciples. They all gathered there and were happy to sit again at the feet of their guru. Hopes were growing that he might continue the work in Germany, but after travelling for a few months in Europe, meeting devotees in Switzerland, France, Holland and Sweden, it became clear to him that his future activities should be in India. As he himself put it, 'I have to water the tree at its roots.' On his way to Sweden he had stopped twice in Hamburg to establish a Vedanta study group there. Before leaving for India he stayed for sometime with his Gurubhai Swami Siddheswarananda at the Vedanta Centre of Gretz near Paris, and advised his German devotees to go to Gretz as often as they could. Especially the Hamburg group remained in close contact with Swami Siddheswarananda and also with Swami Ghanananda of the London Vedanta Centre. When Swami Siddheswarananda passed away in April 1957, it was a big loss for the German Vedanta students, and for several years they had to work all by themselves.

The favourable turn came in 1961, when Swami Ritajananda took charge of the Gretz Centre and started rebuilding it against many obstacles. He was invited by the German Vedanta groups, and the German devotees were again streaming to Gretz for spiritual advice and inspiration. In 1965 the Vedanta Centre of Wiesbaden was re-opened with its own rooms and a library, and Swami Ritajananda came regularly there to give lectures and interviews. As the publishers were still reluctant to take up Vedanta literature, the Centre brought out photocopies of the German translations of the lectures of Swami Ritajananda, Swami Siddheswarananda's *Meditation according to Yoga-Vedanta*, several pamphlets of different swamis, the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*, Sister Devamata's *Days in an Indian Monastery* and the abridged volume of the *Gospel* under the German title *Ramakrishna's Eternal Message*. In 1978, a magazine *Vedanta* was started, which followed the example of Swami Yatiswarananda's publication.

In the meantime the German publishers realized that there is a demand for genuine spiritual literature, and that occult humbug and psychic trash are not enough to satisfy spiritual seekers. One of the biggest of them published in 1981 the abridged *Gospel* under the German title *Ramakrishna, His Heritage*, then a revised edition of Shankara's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and *Ātmabodha*, and a tract *Vedanta and the German Speaking World*. In the same year a German devotee was happy to find a publisher for his new biography on Ramakrishna, which came out as pocket edition under the German title *Ramakrishna, the Actor of the Lord*.

The work that Swami Yatiswarananda started in 1933 slowly grew and bore fruit, and even in times of restlessness and anxiety there was seen an increasing demand for spiritual wisdom. Many people started realizing that Vedanta makes them better Christians, and they slowly learnt to distinguish between the pseudo-teachers and the real teachers of mankind. Vedanta had become an important factor in Germany for all sincere lovers of Truth and spiritual aspirants. There were, by now, Vedanta study groups in different German cities, all working in the traditional line, and guided by Swami Yatiswarananda's advice: 'Never pull down the ideal to a lower level, but struggle hard to reach that ideal, even if it cannot be obtained at the moment.' Two of them worth mentioning are the one centred in Dortmund and another in West Berlin. These groups, functioning independently of each other, used to invite swamis to visit them every year. Swami Ranganathananda's visits to Germany

during his European lecture tours in the post-1960 decades helped these groups to sustain and strengthen their Vedanta work. In the last part of 1980s, they combined into a German Vedanta Society and hoped for the Belur Math authorities to send a resident swami to Germany. When the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Netherlands, started under the inspiration of Swami Ranganathananda, was affiliated to the Order in 1990, it further raised the hopes of the German students of getting a swami soon.

Recently, some ten years ago, some enthusiastic devotees and students of Vedanta formed a Society, 'Vedanta Gesellschaft', and bought a spacious three-storied house at Vedanta Haus, Bindweide 2, 57520 Steinebach/Sieg. Later, another adjacent house was purchased for the purpose of the activities of the society. The members conducted many seminars with devotees, friends and well-wishers at this retreat centre, which provided also accommodation to guests. In spite of financial hardship the activities of the Ashrama continued. Finally, in November 2004, Belur Math sent Swami Baneshananda to takeover the Centre. In December 2004, at the request of the Society, the Centre was made a branch of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, with Swami Baneshananda as its Head.

Situated in a peaceful countryside, the main building of the Ashrama houses a shrine, a classroom and library, and living quarters. The Ashrama conducts currently weekly classes on Vedanta, seminars and retreats on weekends, lectures in different places in Germany, personal counselling, lessons in Sanskrit language, and morning and evening meditation in the shrine, etc.

Endnote

[1] One of such letters sent to Belur Math from Germany, which is given below, reveals the sincerity, longing, and humility of a writer, which spoke for many yearning souls in Germany at that time (*Prabuddha Bharata*, April 1938, 'Vedanta Work in Central Europe'):

> It is with the greatest hesitation I am addressing myself to you... requesting you to send us one of the swamis of the Order to work with us and instruct us. I really cannot tell you how thankful we should be for personal spiritual

instructions as life seems terribly worthless under the present circumstances... We are getting older every day and never getting ever nearer the real Goal of life, that is, never growing to the full stature of a real human being.

I do not know whether any one of us would be worthy to be blessed with the company of one of your swamis, but I cannot tell Your Holiness how thankful we should be for it. Theoretical knowledge can never bring the realization of Truth, and it is extremely difficult for ordinary people to find the right way alone without the help of a living guide.

I hope you will forgive me for this letter. It might so easily seem arrogant, and I am afraid the only excuse I can offer you is the great admiration and love we have for your Holy Order and its Master.

Besides, we see no other way of getting spiritual instruction as we cannot go to India for lack of funds.

Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa

SOUTH AFRICA is the southernmost country in the African continent, which is the second largest continent in the world. The idea of starting Ramakrishna Movement in Africa first germinated in Swami Vivekananda's mind. Between 1893 and 1897 he had unfurled the flag of Vedanta in America and England. He had also foreseen vast possibilities for his work in Africa, as is clear from his letter written to Swami Shivananda from Jaipur in December 1897:

> Mr. Setlur of Girgaon, Bombay, whom you know very well from Madras, writes to me to send somebody to Africa to look after the religious needs of the Indian emigrants in Africa.... The work will not be congenial at present, I am afraid... No immediate result can be expected, but in the long run it will prove a more beneficial work for India than any yet attempted. I wish you to try your luck in this.

But instead of Africa, Swami Shivananda was destined to go to Sri Lanka. The socio-political background of the Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa has its roots in the colonization of Africa. Indians started migrating to South Africa in the 1860s as indentured labourers to work in the sugarcane fields. The majority of Indians lived in and around Durban. The European nations were then colonizing Africa. The colonization of Africa had begun in the fifteenth century, with Britain, Germany, and Portuguese vying with one another to establish their hegemony over the continent. The Anglo-Boer war in the beginning of the twentieth century clinched the issue in favour of Britain.

Britain organized South Africa into the colonies of Transvaal, Natal, Orange Free State, and Cape, and pursued its offensive policy of racial discrimination. The British policy of apartheid caused untold misery to the non-whites, especially the blacks. The rampant discrimination and humiliation to which the non-whites were subjected were of the most inhuman type. The history of Indian struggle in South Africa in now well known. Under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, South Africans put forth an organized and united front against apartheid and other injustices. Mahatma Gandhi, for the first time, experimented with his new weapon, *satyāgraha*. Gandhiji left South Africa in 1914.

Swami Adyananda arrived in South Africa in 1934. He was the first swami of the Ramakrishna Order to arrive there. The Hindu community of Transvaal had requested the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission in India to send a swami to South Africa to spread the message of Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Adyananda stayed there for one year, lecturing in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, and other places. Meanwhile, the struggle of the non-whites, including Indians, continued.

In 1942, a young dynamic Indian, Dhangopal Naidu by name, formed a literary group to encourage the study of Hindu religion, philosophy and culture. The group used to meet in secret. Dhangopal was imprisoned for his activities against the atrocities inflicted by the whites on the non-whites. In 1946 the group formally formed the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. Swami Ghanananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna Centre in England, arrived there in 1947. He did not stay there long, but he wrote a letter of introduction to Belur Math for Dhangopal, then in his early twenties.

Deeply influenced by Swami Vivekananda's teachings of 'renunciation and service', Dhangopal went to India in 1948 to enter the monastic path. He lived as a novice in Belur Math and was initiated into the vows of brahmacharya by Swami Virajananda, the then President of the Ramakrishna Order. But Dhangopal was keen to ameliorate the condition of South Africans, and he knew it could not be done if he continued in the Ramakrishna Order in India. With Swami Virajananda's permission, he received the vows of sannyāsa from Swami Purushottamananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, who was then staying in Vasishtha Guha near Rishikesh. He was given the monastic name 'Swami Nishchalananda'. Thereafter he travelled penniless on foot

visiting many places of pilgrimage, including Kailash in Tibet. Finally, after cutting off his formal ties with the Ramakrishna Order, he returned to South Africa in 1953 with his noble vision of South African work.

In 1954, Swami Nihshreyasananda of the Ramakrishna Order arrived in Africa on invitation. During his stay there he visited Zambia, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Nigeria and other adjacent countries. He travelled extensively in East, Central, and West Africa, spreading the message of Vedanta. He came again in 1956 and formed a study-circle in Salisbury (now Harare), Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). In 1959, invited by the study-circle, the Swami again visited Africa and thenceforth stayed there for about 15 years. For the unhampered facility of his spiritual work he was granted Rhodesian citizenship in 1965. Under his initiative the study-circle was given a legal status and it opened a Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Society in August 1972 in its own premises at 35 Rhodes Avenue, Salisbury. During the Swami's long stay there the message of Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna reached many countries of Africa.

Meanwhile, Swami Nishchalananda gave a firm footing to Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa. He worked hard to spread the ideals of Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna. By 1959 he had gathered enough support to purchase a 14-acre property just outside Durban (the site of the present Ashram) where he opened the headquarters of Ramakrishna Centre, a clinic, and a press. He conducted prayer, meditation, and scriptural classes, and performed the ritual worship of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. A quarterly journal in English, *Jyoti*, was started in 1959.

The Swami worked to boost the lowered spirit of the people who had been ostracized. He instilled in them self-confidence and pride through proper education. The centre brought out publications in various languages to remedy the lack of information, or rather misinformation, about Hinduism. He helped the poor in various ways. Moreover, he was the early initiator of inter-religious dialogues in South Africa and a pioneer in running relief programmes among the blacks — a bold step for an Indian to undertake at that time. He even became a patron of the (Black) Inanda African Women's Christian Association. He was assassinated in 1965 at the young age of 40.

He had left behind his only monastic disciple, Swami Shivapadananda, who intensified and expanded the work started by his Guru. In 1961 South Africa gained independence from British rule and became the Republic of South Africa. However, even under the new political regime, the white-minority rule and the obnoxious practice of apartheid continued. During Swami Shivapadananda's tenure the different sub-centres in Natal province came to be closely inter-linked and the centre became a well-known organization in South Africa. Devotees managed to purchase land, open centres, and continue the educational, social and spiritual work, often in the face of state opposition. In 1980, Sri Sarada Devi Ashram, a convent, was opened in a suburb of Durban. Although run by nuns, the Ashram was at first an integral part of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa. It housed Pravrajikas Atmaprana and Ishtaprana, and a number of long-term female residents. Some months ago (in 2006) the centre was completely separated from Ramakrishna Centre, Durban, and since then has been functioning as an independent centre.

Swami Shivapadananda passed away in 1994. His disciple, Swami Saradananda, then took up the charge of the centre. In 1994, for the first time in the history of South Africa, blacks came to power and the white-minority-rule

ended, which also put an official end to apartheid. Nelson Mandela was the first among the blacks to become the President of the Republic of South Africa. It was in this encouraging scene that a new temple for Sri Ramakrishna was consecrated in Durban in July 1995. The main campus of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa has now this imposing temple. It forms the centre of the Ashram complex that includes residential quarters and a busy administrative block. There are today some thirty sub-centres and other groups in the country. The centre conducts ritual worship, devotional gatherings, and spiritual discourses. The activities of the centre have been varied, including medical care, relief to riot victims, and also feeding the poor, etc.

With the formation of the new government in 1994, Indian government again established its political and diplomatic links with South Africa, which had been deliberately cut off for many decades as a political measure against the white-ruled government and its practise of racial discrimination. With this the Indian community in South Africa started coming closer to Ramakrishna Mission in India. As a result, at the request of the Hindus in Zambia, a new centre was started in Lusaka in 2001. Swami Brahmeshananda was appointed the Head of the centre. However, due to some unpleasant developments, the centre had to be disaffiliated in 2002, and the Swami returned to India. The centre in South Africa also had been expressing its keen desire to get affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission in India. Accordingly, in July 2006, preliminary steps were taken for the affiliation process. One important feature of the centre is the sincere attempt being made to establish rapport with the black community and serve its members in as many ways as possible.

Thus, the present state of Ramakrishna Movement in South Africa, its extent and steady growth, lends credence to Swami Vivekananda's foresight about his African work. The Movement has made a good start and has been given a firm footing. It holds vast possibilities for the coming decades.*

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* Material for this article was collected from Allan Hunter's 'Fifty Years of Struggle: The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa' published in *Vedanta*, Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, UK, September-October 1998 issue, p. 195; *A Pilgrim Looks at the World* by Swami Ranganathananda, Vol. 2, pp. 537 ff; and also the Web site of Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa: www.ramakrishna-sa.org.za.

Ramakrishna Movement in Russia

PART I*

SWAMI TATHAGATANANDA

Russia's Interest in Vedanta — Early Russian Indologists

TOWARDS THE beginning of the nineteenth century, Russian scholars and writers shared with Western Europe an intense interest in Indian studies, especially studies in Buddhism. During the same period that Anquetil Duperron was writing his Latin translation, *Oupnek'hat*, in Paris, the message of Vedanta was entering Russia.

One of the earliest Russians to visit India with serious interest was Gerasim Lebedev (1746-1817). Russia's interest in Asian languages towards the end of the eighteenth century was actually motivated by commercial and political concerns. Russian scholarship and research was largely concentrated in Mongolia, Siberia and Turkestan. From the middle of the nineteenth century, Russia's interest in Sanskrit and Hindu literature produced a growing commitment to Indian studies by her scholars. The Asiatic Academy at the University of Saint Petersburg was inaugurated in 1818. By the late nineteenth century, partial translations of the *Ṛg-Veda*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* also appeared in Russian. Russian philosophers and writers now began to show their preference for the spiritual.

* Culled (after minor changes and updating the matter) from the author's *Journey of the Upaniṣads to the West*, 2nd Edition, 2005, Advaita Ashrama, 'Russia's Interest in Vedanta', 518 ff.

Among the well-known Russians influenced by the Indian spiritual thought, especially the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology, are Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889-1968), and Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947).

From his early youth, Tolstoy reverently cultivated his interest in Indian culture and literature. The *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Tamil *Tirukkural*, and the modern Indian spiritual literature of his time greatly influenced Tolstoy. He was familiar with Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East* and with Swami Vivekananda's writings, which left a profound impression on his mind and heart. Alexander I. Shiffman, a distinguished Tolstoy scholar, wrote:

> Among the Indian philosophers of the medieval period, he studied more thoroughly Shankara and, among the more recent, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and his pupil Swami Vivekananda.... During his last years Tolstoy did not concern himself with Ramakrishna except selecting from his works passages for the inclusion in his new collections of ancient sayings which he had compiled previously. At this time he was considerably more interested in Vivekananda's teachings.

Vivekananda's *Philosophy of Yoga* was translated into Russian in 1911. Yakov Popov (1844-1918), a philanthropist who served in the Russian military, met Swami Vivekananda in Calcutta and was inspired to publish his Russian translations of Swamiji's writings on the four *Yogas* between 1906 and 1914. Swamiji's *Lectures on Rāja-Yoga* underwent three editions after being translated into Russian in 1911. Romain Rolland wrote that in 1896 Tolstoy

> felt exhilarated to see Vivekananda's first published works, *Yoga's Philosophy and Lectures on Rāja-Yoga*. He was also delighted at Vivekananda's book on Paramahamsa Sri Ramakrishna. It is the misfortune of mankind that Vivekananda, in the course of his travels in Europe in 1900, was not advised to go to Yasnaya Polyana.....

A collective work on Swami Vivekananda by Russian scholars, *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union* (1987), is devoted to 'various aspects of Vivekananda's world outlook and activity' and to his 'heritage as a humanist, democrat, patriot, and distinguished leader of the spiritual culture of India.' On 7 May 1909, Tolstoy declared to his publisher that 'the most eminent of

modern Indian thinkers is Vivekananda and he should be published'. Tolstoy was envisioning the publication of an anthology of Vivekananda's sayings and an inexpensive series of books about Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, which 'would be superb for the common people'.

Romain Rolland expressed an interesting point of view in this regard. Rolland knew Dilip Kumar Roy, a gifted Indian musician who also had an intimate knowledge of and proficiency in Western and Indian music. On one occasion, Rolland said to Roy:

> You will be surprised, Dilip, if I tell you that Tolstoy, in the last years of his life, was very much absorbed in the writings of Vivekananda. His very good and intimate friend, P. Biryukov and many other writers, still now think intensely and lovingly of Swami Vivekananda. Especially in Russia, there are many people of eminence, who are enamoured of Vivekananda's writings.

Until the last year of his life, Tolstoy stressed the need to disseminate Vivekananda's works. Three years before his death, Tolstoy acknowledged Sri Ramakrishna to be a saint and praised him as such. In March 1909, Tolstoy indicated his plan to publish *The Sayings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda* and included it in a list of new books he was recommending for popular reading. The book never materialized, but other selections he had collected from Max Müller's *Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings* were translated into Russian by I. F. Nazhivin in 1913 after Tolstoy's death. Nazhivin and others translated additional works.

Pitirim A. Sorokin dedicated His *Reconstruction of Humanity* (1948) to the 'deathless Mohandas K. Gandhi'. In 1950, he edited a selection of essays from a symposium, *Explorations in Altruistic Love and Behaviour*, which included a manuscript by Swami Akhilananda, who knew many Harvard University scholars and was in charge of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta Society of Massachusetts in Boston. The book on altruistic love and behaviour and Sorokin's essays on yoga earned him an invitation to the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary of 1936-37. He was unable to attend, but later delivered a lecture at a banquet held in Boston on 4 April 1957 to observe the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. He made the following observation:

> A successful growth of Sri Ramakrishna and of the Vedanta Movements in the West is one of many symptoms of two basic processes which are going on at the present time in the human universe. One of these changes is the epochal shift of the creative center of mankind from Europe to the larger area of the Pacific-Atlantic, while the other consists in a double process of continued decay of sensate culture and society and of the emergence and growth of the new — Integral or Ideational — socio-cultural order.

Modern Russian history is replete with interesting accounts, not only about Russian interest in Vedanta, but about the Russian people's support for the cause of the Indian people.

Nicholas Roerich, one of Russia's foremost artists, departed for the United States in 1917. The Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York City is dedicated to his artwork, including allegorical mystical paintings depicting Indian themes. One finds a spontaneous, moving recollection in his diary of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda that he experienced while travelling in the Mongolian desert. Returning to base camp from the stony hills of Shiret Obo one day, he was struck by a compelling sight: in the vast desert expanse he found a towering elm tree and its broad shadow spread out on the sand. Approaching it, he looked up and saw traces of myriad birds and creatures that harboured high in its leaves and branches; in the sand beneath, patterns of larger mammals passing by its redeeming shade could be seen. Marvelling at the sight, Roerich's memory was stirred, and his mind

> vividly turned to the shadow of the banyan [the *Panchavati* under which Sri Ramakrishna meditated and achieved *samādhi*]. The mighty branches reminded us of other great achievements of India. What a joy to think of India! Thoughts turned to the radiant giant of India — Sri Ramakrishna... there remains over the whole world the one great name — Ramakrishna. The personal name has already changed into a great all-national, universal concept...in various countries has grown the understanding of the radiant Teaching of Ramakrishna. Beyond shameful words of hatred, beyond evil mutual destruction — the word of Bliss, which is close to every human heart, spreads widely like the mighty branches of the sacred banyan tree. On the paths of human searching, these calls of goodwill were shining like beacons. We ourselves witnessed and have often heard how books of

Ramakrishna's teaching were as if unexpectedly found by sincere seekers. We ourselves came across the book in a most unusual way.

Great power is contained in a united benevolent thought. Humanity should value such sublime manifestations, which are the cause of all these unifying and constructive thoughts.... The names of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and the glorious host of their followers remain on the most remarkable pages of the history of the spiritual culture of India.... Many millenniums ago the words of Wisdom were already recorded in India. And how many more millenniums were they preserved even before, in verbal transmission. And in this sacred mouth-to-ear transmission they were kept perhaps even safer than on written records.

Service to humanity — great is this ordainment of Ramakrishna!

In a letter Roerich wrote to Swami Abhedananda in 1928 (the year that he emigrated to India), he confessed that Sri Ramakrishna's teachings had led him to venerate Swami Vivekananda and had drawn him to India, where he lived until his death in 1947. In India, Roerich became acquainted with the thought and life of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He also visited Belur Math — one of his paintings hangs in the old monastery building. His wife Elena was a deep thinker and philosopher. Her *Living Ethics*, a work of fourteen volumes, is pure yoga. His son, Yuri Nikolaevich George Nicholas Roerich (1902-1960), was a specialist in Tibetan Buddhism. He was also a linguist and learned Persian, Tibetan, Chinese and Sanskrit in England. Yuri collected materials relating to India's influence in Tibet, China, Turkestan and Mongolia, as part of an expedition led by his father to these areas between 1926 and 1929. He married an Indian woman and lived in India from 1923 to 1957, after which he returned to Russia and joined Leningrad University as a professor of Sanskrit and Tibetan. He was profoundly influenced by Ramakrishna's ideal of service to humanity.

In an article 'Vivekananda for Post-Communist Russia', R. B. Rybakov, Russia's eminent Indologist, historian and senior Research Fellow of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, wrote:

The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and his closest disciple Swami Vivekananda have always constituted an issue of lively interest for the

> Russian readers from the beginning of this century [20th]. Several years before the October Revolution, or more precisely, even before the commencement of the First World War, the first volumes of the translated version of the precepts of Sri Ramakrishna and the works of Swami Vivekananda were published and became known among the elite circles of Russian intelligentsia....

Russian Publications of Romain Rolland's Works and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

Russia's interest in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda was ignited by Romain Rolland's biographies of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna and his article, 'Asia's Reply to Tolstoy', which formed a chapter in K. Lomunov's *Tolstoy and the Contemporary World*. These works of Rolland were primary vehicles of the living wisdom of the Upaniṣads. In 1936, during the period of heaviest censorship in Russia, his *Life of Ramakrishna* was inconspicuously published in Russia. Rolland's volumes that escaped the terrible literary purges were published anew in their entirety after the Second World War and became available through the public libraries. It is remarkable that the edition most favoured and requested by Russian readers was 'that small old edition which appeared first'. Brezhnev permitted Rybakov to rewrite selections from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (originally published in New York in 1942), though Russian editors restricted Rybakov and he was forced to delete all references to 'God'.

In later years Gorbachov permitted the immediate publication of newly revised and reprinted editions of Rolland's *Life of Ramakrishna* as a part of *Perestroika*, his liberal reforms. Rolland's biography of Sri Ramakrishna was first published in monthly serial form, causing widespread duplication and a tripling of sales for the journal. Simultaneous publications of the book appeared in Leningrad and Kiev and a Vivekananda Society was established to promote spiritual culture. Sri Ramakrishna's sayings were modernized and these, as well as Swami Vivekananda's most important works, were translated and published. Over the years, Rolland's works have attracted and inspired Ramakrishna-Vivekananda scholars as well as scholars interested in Hindu philosophy.

Modern Russian Interest in Vedanta

We find from Marie Louise Burke that Swamiji had to give up his trip to Russia because of ill health and too much work. Marie Louise Burke notes (*New Discoveries*, Vol. 4, 505):

> Although the Imperial Russia of Swamiji's day was not a cultural force in Europe, Swamiji sensed a world power growing there. 'The next great upheaval which is to bring about a new epoch will come from Russia or China. I can't quite see which, but it will be either Russia or China,' he had said in 1895. The Russians, moreover, were a deeply religious people, imbued with mysticism and without prejudice toward India. The Czar himself had, to Swamiji's delight, spoken of India as the land of spirituality and wisdom.

The late Swami Bhavyananda of the Vedanta Centre in England had the occasion to visit Russia for two weeks in 1975 with a friend, as a tourist, before the breakup of Russian society. Yet he was impressed and saw a future for Vedanta in Russia in spite of the strict guidlines of tourist travel at the time.

Soviet intellectuals in reputable posts in Russia are gradually showing their sustained interest in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda phenomenon. From the 1980s, Professor V. S. Kostyuchenko's monograph, 'Conception of Neo-Vedantism', Rybakov's 'Bourgeois Reformation of Hinduism', and other Russian studies of the religious and philosophical heritage of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda have been published in Russia. Dr. E. P. Chelishev, a noted Soviet academician, came to know about Swami Vivekananda from the biography written by Romain Rolland. At the request of the Ramakrishna Mission, Dr. Chelishev, who was the Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, gladly accepted the Vice Presidency of the Committee for Comprehensive Study of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. The Committee's President was the great Orientalist, A. L. Basham. On 28 November 1983, Dr. Chelishev sent a letter to Swami Lokeswarananda:

> The name of Swami Vivekananda is very popular in Soviet Russia and he is held in high esteem by our countrymen. Soviet people respect him as a great democrat, humanist and patriot who contributed immensely in the

development of national consciousness and the anti-colonial liberation movement in India. They also consider that his message and the message of Sri Ramakrishna, which are really one, are absolutely necessary for the survival of the human civilization which is now in great danger due to the menace of the devastating nuclear war.

The famed Orientalist and academician visited the Ramakrishna Mission in November 1983. Having specialized in Indian literature and the Hindi dialect in particular, he was appointed head of the Indian Languages and Literature Section at Moscow University's Institute of International Relations before assuming his post as director of the Institute of Oriental Studies. Dr. Chelishev was a member of the Soviet Writers Union and the Soviet Peace Committee and Vice-President of the *Indo-Soviet Friendship Society*. He also received the Jawaharlal Nehru Prize for Peace. Several of his articles appear in *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union*, including 'Swami Vivekananda — The Indian Humanist, Democrat and Patriot'. The lengthy article was chosen to be included in the *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume.* Russian scholarship on Swami Vivekananda has been going on for the last thirty years. Dr. Chelishev was one of the ardent members of this group of scholars.

In October 1984, Swami Lokeswarananda's visit and lectures in Russia culminated in meetings with eight Russian scholars in order to study India's culture and philosophy. Harish C. Gupta translated their works from Russian into English for the authoritative book, *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union*, which was published by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta in 1987. The 150th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was observed the same year in a three-day seminar held by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture from January 16 to 18. It was organized in collaboration with the Cultural Affairs Committee of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow and the Soviet Writers Union. Fourteen Russian scholars from various disciplines participated, led by Dr. Rybakov.

Swami Lokeswarananda received two of the Russian participants — physicists Mark A. Mokulski, Director of the Institute of Molecular Genetics at Russia's Academy of Sciences, and his wife, Tamara, as his guests. They felt privileged to stay a few days at the Ramakrishna Math in Belur and by the side of the Ganges. Dr. Mokulski delivered one of the lectures. In his statements,

he mentioned the translations of Rolland's works in Russia, as well as the information about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda that is available in Russian encyclopedias. Speaking about the inspiration their lives give to the Russian poets, he recalled the strong impression he received as a young student upon reading Rolland's biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Dr. Mokulski was deeply impressed by the accounts of the superior states of consciousness experienced by Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi.

In 1991, Swami Bhavyananda made another visit to Russia and noted: 'A fresh breeze of freedom is blowing all over the politically shaken Soviet Union... though shortages of food and commodities cause anxiety, the innate spiritual strength of the people is evident. There is a longing for spiritual freedom.' He noted that there was increasing requests for books on Vedanta and Indian philosophy. Today, there are new Russian programmes for research on the Ramakrishna Mission, Sri Ramakrishna and his direct disciples, and Swami Vivekananda, along with Hindu scriptures and Buddhism. Members of the Eastern Institute Section of the Academy of Sciences have a special interest in modern Indian languages. Many Russian scholars have been inspired to visit the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture at Gol Park for these purposes.

Thus, after the visits of some swamis such as Swami Ranganathananda Swami Hiranmayananda, Swami Bhavyananda, and Swami Lokeswarananda, the *Ramakrishna Society Vedanta Centre* was founded in 1991 and registered in 1995 in Moscow. The Ramakrishna Mission officially recognized it in 1993 and Swami Jyotirupananda of the Order was sent there to head the Centre. The Centre enjoys the active support of scholars, writers and artists. A centre, *Ramakrishna Society*, has already been established in Saint Petersburg under the inspiration of Swami Lokeswarananda. Since then the work has been gradually extended also to Lithuania, Latvia, and Bulgaria.

The thirst for Vedanta literature in Russia is increasing. *Life of Ramakrishna*, originally published by Advaita Ashrama in Calcutta, and the Bengali version of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* will be published in the Russian language in the near future. The work of translating the Bengali *Mayer Katha* (Gospel of the Holy Mother) has also been undertaken. One Russian publishing house has issued a translation of Christopher Isherwood's *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* in Russian. Several Russian publishing houses have issued new

Russian editions of Swami Abhedananda's *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which was first published in Russia in 1914. In the last decade, Swami Vivekananda's *Practical Vedanta*, incorporating all the *Yogas* of Swamiji along with other articles, has also been published in Russian. Rolland's *Life of Ramakrishna* and *Life of Vivekananda* have been reprinted in the Russian language in several Russian cities.

Today, Russians are deeply motivated to disseminate Vivekananda's teachings and to introduce them in a practical way in their daily life. Inspired by the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Russians are planning to inaugurate an institute of spiritual culture in the immediate future.

PART II

The Way to Vivekananda in Russia

E. P. CHELISHEV

The establishment of our contacts with the Ramakrishna Mission founded by Vivekananda in 1897 dates back to the middle of the 1950s. The author of these lines was fortunate enough to be the first of our Indologists to meet, in Delhi, Swami Ranganathananda, the prominent representative and leading theoretician of the Mission, and the thirteenth President of the Order. In 1961 he visited Moscow and Leningrad where he delivered lectures, got acquainted with the scholars and came to know something of the life of the Russians. He wrote about all these things in his two volume work, *A Pilgrim Looks at the World*, published in India in 1974-75.

In 1963 in our country the Centenary of the birth of Swami Vivekananda was solemnly celebrated. The scientific conference, where the chairman was the academician B. D. Gafurov, and the participants, A. N. Komarov, A. D. Litman, and myself, was held in the Institute of the Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences. My article 'Swami Vivekananda — the Indian Humanist, Democrat and Patriot' was included in the *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume* published in India with a preface by the philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, at that time the President of India.

The celebration of Vivekananda's Centenary stimulated the growth of scientific interest in his heritage in this country, in the Ramakrishna Mission activities, and in the religious and social reformation in India at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. The contacts of Russian scholars with the Cultural Institute of the Ramakrishna Mission in Calcutta are gradually becoming closer and more fruitful. The Institute's publication in 1987 of the collective work of Russian scholars, *Swami Vivekananda Studies in the Soviet Union*, was the acknowledgement of their contribution to the investigation of Vivekananda's universal message.

In 1988 our country widely celebrated the millennium of Christianity in Russia. Many eminent religious leaders from different countries took part in solemn ceremonies dedicated to this glorious occasion. The unique representative of Hinduism at this celebration was the Director of the Cultural Institute of the Ramakrishna Mission in Calcutta, Swami Lokeswarananda. Together with the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church and their representatives from many countries, he took a seat at the Presidium of the solemn meeting dedicated to this occasion which was held at the Bolshoi Theatre.

After the meeting, a round-table discussion was held where the role of spiritual culture in the promotion of friendship and mutual understanding between all people was examined. Swami Lokeswarananda, the Reverend Alexis, at that time Metropolitan of Leningrad and Tallin and now the Holy Patriarch of Moscow and all of Russia, and myself took part in it. The record of this talk was published in English as a brochure and released at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta.

At the same time the Swami Vivekananda Society, organized for the investigation and popularization of Indian spiritual culture, was founded in Moscow. I consider the 1989 awarding to myself of the Swami Vivekananda International Prize as the acknowledgement of the contribution of Soviet scholars to the investigation of Swami Vivekananda's heritage.

The scholars, members of the Society, published in 1994 a journal *Saraswati* which includes their analytical articles and the translations of some of Swami Vivekananda's works.

The comparative analyses of the spiritual values of Russia and India show that many elements that are typical of Russian spiritual culture are also typical for the Indian culture. The quest for self-perfection and the confirmation of

the ideal of high morality are of great importance for both cultures. For ages conscience was the most important moral category for both Russians and Indians. The voices of the prophets of peace, kindness, justice and disinterestedness, which awoke in human souls the sentiment of compassion, were heard in both Russia and India. The importance of ecology and concern for nature is found in both spiritual cultures, and doing harm to nature is considered to be a great sin.

All this can be found in Vivekananda's heritage. His words sound today surprisingly modern and, what is very important, they correspond to our own thoughts and reflections. We sympathize with his search for the rebirth of the ancient spiritual greatness of India because we ourselves are now trying to clean our historic conscience and to find in popular knowledge the vital sources which could help us find the road to a better future. The ideas of Vivekananda about universal religion, his appeal to the struggle against occultism, against reactionary traditionalism, against the prejudice and superstition that serve as a base for religious, racial, and national conflicts, are extremely important for the modern world. We cannot neglect the high estimation by Vivekananda of the role of science and secular education that must be accessible to all mankind. We cannot ignore his attribution of importance to social questions and his solid faith in the triumph of social justice.

The year 1993 was marked by the edition in Russian of the *Selected Works of Vivekananda*. In this way, we have, to a certain extent, fulfilled the dream of Leo Tolstoy, who wrote a year before his death, 'We are preparing the edition of the selected thoughts of Vivekananda for whom I have great respect.' Unfortunately, the great Russian writer did not manage to realize this idea. We cannot even imagine the activities of our society without cooperation with the people of India. Therefore we are inspired by the support we gain from many prominent representatives of their culture.

Ramakrishna Movement in Sri Lanka

SWAMI SHUDDHIDANANDA

SRI LANKA, the small island state at the southern tip of the Indian peninsula, was known as Ceylon till 1972. Sri Lanka and India share common ethnic and cultural heritage. Emperor Ashoka's son, Mahindra, had sown the seeds of Buddhism in Sri Lanka more than 2000 years ago. Today three-fourths of the 20 million people in Sri Lanka are Sinhalese Buddhists. Hindus, most of whom speak Tamil, constitute only one-sixth of the population. Other religious groups include Muslims and Christians. The influence of Ramakrishna Movement in Sri Lanka has been restricted to the Hindu population. The beginning of this influence may be traced to Swami Vivekananda's second visit to Ceylon in 1897. Before that Swami Vivekananda had visited the Island in 1893 when he was on his way to America. At that time no one took note of the Swami who was to soon storm the western world with his spiritual ideas and also later sow the seeds of a new movement in Sri Lanka. There are three phases discernible in the growth of Ramakrishna Movement in Sri Lanka.

The First Phase (1897-1915): Impact of Swami Vivekananda in Ceylon and the Beginning

Ramakrishna Movement in Sri Lanka can be said to have begun on Friday, 15 January 1897 when Swami Vivekananda stepped on the shores of Colombo as a world-celebrity and prophet of modern spiritual renaissance. Echoes of

Swamiji's stupendous success in the Chicago Parliament of Religions of 1893, and subsequent work of spreading Vedanta, which marked the awakening of a new spiritual consciousness in the West, had reached India and Ceylon even before his arrival in Colombo. Several of the Indian and Ceylonese newspapers had flashed across the land the news of his historic accomplishments in the West. *The Hindu Organ*, published by the Jaffna Shaiva Paripalana Sabhai, had been regularly publishing Swamiji's speeches. As a result a commendable section of Ceylonese elite had already been introduced to a new world of thought even before his arrival. Taking pride in his achievements, they eagerly looked forward to give him a grand ovation, and, consequently, on his arrival, the reception accorded to him in Colombo was royal, the kind of which was unprecedented in the Island's history. Newspapers in the Island, especially *The Ceylon Independent* and *Overland Ceylon Observer*, gave wide coverage to this event. Swami Niranjanananda, one of his brother disciples, had come from the Indian mainland to Colombo to receive him. Swamiji stayed in Ceylon for ten days. During those days he travelled from Colombo to Kandy, Matale, Anuradhapuram, Vavuniya, and Jaffna. Everywhere he received tumultuous receptions and had to address large enthusiastic groups eager to catch his electrifying words. Continuous meeting with people and long travels left him tired. The worshipful reverence of the devotees for the Swami can be judged by the remarks of one of his companions: 'He would have been killed with kindness if he had stayed longer in Ceylon.' Wherever he went he was requested by the local people to send spiritual teachers to their respective towns to preach the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Assuring them that he would, Swamiji left for the Indian mainland on 26 January.

Formation of Vivekananda Societies

Inspired by Swamiji's life-giving message, the Hindu population of the Island resolved to give it a definite shape and formed 'Vivekananda Societies' at various places. The Vivekananda Society of Colombo was formally declared open on 13 July 1902, just a few days after Swamiji's mahāsamādhi. By the year 1906, Jaffna, Manipay, Anuradhapuram, Matale, Trincomalee and Batticaloa too had their own Vivekananda Societies. Among the activities of these Societies were conducting of libraries and religious discourses. A press,

a book depot, and a bilingual paper were started in Jaffna, which disseminated the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

In those embryonic days these Vivekananda Societies helped to popularize the Movement among the people. Till the 1930s it was Colombo Vivekananda Society which hosted all the swamis visiting from the Indian mainland, and among its various activities was the publication of a Tamil monthly in furtherance of the Movement's ideals.

Visits of Sri Ramakrishna's other direct disciples

Eight of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna (including Swamiji) had visited Ceylon at different times. We have already mentioned Swami Niranjanananda's visit to Colombo to receive Swamiji in January 1897. As per the assurance given by Swamiji to the people of Ceylon that he would send spiritual men to guide them, he sent Swami Shivananda in the middle of 1897. Swami Shivananda stayed there for about seven months spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna. It was he who laid the spiritual foundation of the centre at Colombo, which was to later become Ramakrishna Mission's affiliated centre in 1930. He greatly succeeded in keeping ablaze the flame lit by Swamiji. During his stay there he trained a capable Western student, Mrs Elsie Picket, who was later instrumental in spreading the message of Vedanta in Australia. In February 1898 he returned to Calcutta.

In June 1899, Swami Vivekananda, then on the way to his second visit to the West, again came to Colombo. This time he stayed there for only one day and spent time meeting his old acquaintances. In this visit he was accompanied by Swami Turiyananda, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. After this, some of the other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna too visited Ceylon at short intervals. Swami Trigunatitananda visited Ceylon in 1903 when

he was on his way to America. This was followed by the visits of Swami Abhedananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda in 1906. Swami Ramakrishnananda had come to Colombo to receive Swami Abhedananda, who was visiting India for the first time after his going to the West. The Colombo Vivekananda Society honoured Swami Abhedananda with a grand reception. The two Swamis then travelled to various places in Ceylon on a lecture tour. Their inspiring speeches further strengthened the incipient Movement. Swami Vijnanananda was the last among the direct disciples to visit Ceylon. He came there in 1934.

The visits of these pioneering swamis awakened the Hindus of Ceylon to the urgent need of a social regeneration. The swamis had advocated 'right type' of education as the means to achieve this end. As a result, a few devoted souls started giving definite shape to this idea. In 1912 Sister Avabhamiya, a Swedish disciple of Swami Abhedananda, visited Ceylon. Inspired as she was by Swami Vivekananda's educational ideas, she established two schools at Karaitivu and Araipattai respectively in 1912, which were later taken over by Ramakrishna Mission. Similarly, Mr. T. Nagamuttu, a teacher and warden at the Jaffna Hindu College, founded the Vaidyeswara Vidyalaya in 1913 at Vannarponnai, Jaffna. This institution too came under the aegis of Ramakrishna Mission in later years.

In this way, the impact of Swamiji's visit in 1897 paved the way for the beginning of Ramakrishna Movement in Ceylon. It was further strengthened by the visits of his brother disciples. However, it was the Vivekananda Societies that played a crucial role in the steady growth of the infant Movement in the first phase. This phase lasted till 1915.

The Second Phase (1915-1960) : The Era of Educational Institutions

The second phase of the Movement began with the appearance of Swami Vipulananda on the scene. Before that Swami Sharvananda, the then President of Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore (Madras), being invited by the different societies and groups in Ceylon, had started visiting the Island from 1915 onwards. His illuminating talks roused immense enthusiasm among the people. In 1917 he took over the management of Vaidyeswara Vidyalaya, Jaffna, at the request of its founder T. Nagamuttu. It became the first institution in Ceylon to be taken over

by Ramakrishna Mission. From this time Ramakrishna Mission began to be directly involved in the work in Ceylon, mainly in the field of education.

During one of these visits of Swami Sharvananda, Pandit Mylvaganam, a brilliant young man who was to later become Swami Vipulananda and spearhead the Movement for three decades, came under his influence. Mylvaganam was then a science teacher at the St. Patricks College, Jaffna. A Vivekananda Society was formed at his residence in Anaipanthy, Jaffna. In 1922 he joined the Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore (Madras), as a novice. Later Swami Shivananda ordained him into sannyāsa in 1924 and gave him the monastic name 'Swami Vipulananda'.

Educational ventures in Jaffna and Trincomalee

After his sannyāsa in 1924, Swami Vipulananda came back to Ceylon. He then became the manager of the Vaidyeswara Vidyalaya, Jaffna. Well aware of the sad plight of the masses steeped in backwardness and illiteracy, which was more so in the Island's eastern province, he started organizing educational activities with the aim of bringing about social uplift. Under his guidance, the management of several Hindu schools were taken over and a few new ones were started by the Mission.

At the earnest request of the Vivekananda Society of Trincomalee, Swami Sharvananda and Swami Vipulananda visited Trincomalee in December 1924. Their benign presence and inspiring talks evoked the enthusiasm of the local people and, as a result, a new centre was opened there. The responsibility of organizing the work of this centre was entrusted to Swami Vipulananda. Thus on 9 May 1925 the first Ramakrishna Ashrama in Ceylon came to be in Trincomalee. In June 1925 the management of the Trincomalee Hindu Boys' English School (later known as Hindu College) and Hindu Boys' Tamil School was transferred to Swami Vipulananda and an association called 'Sri Ramakrishna Educational Association'. In November 1925 the foundation for the new building of the English School at Trincomalee was laid, and in July 1928 the Trincomalee school buildings were ceremoniously declared open by His Excellency Sir Herbert Stanley, the then Governor of Ceylon.

In June 1926 Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home was opened in the premises called Vellikilamai Matham in Vannaraponnai, Jaffna, with just four

Swami Vipulananda

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Colombo

Persatuan Sri Ramakrishna Sarada, Malaysia

Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore

Ramakrishna Mission, Mauritius

Vedanta Society of Japan

inmates. It was to function in the lines of the Home at Mylapore (Madras). In 1929 it was moved to Kalladi Uppodai, Batticaloa, to become a part of the newly started Shivananda Vidyalaya there.

As a result of the spate of activities during these years, more hands for the able execution of new projects became necessary. In November 1926 Swami Avinashananda arrived in Jaffna to assist Swami Vipulananda. He was followed by Swami Paripurnananda. By this time the Vaidyeswara Vidyalaya at Jaffna had become a hive of Mission's activity under the inspiration of Vipulananda. Thus, within a short time the Mission's activities, beneficent to the Ceylonese society, spread in the different parts of the Island.

Educational ventures in Batticaloa

While these developments were taking place in Jaffna and Trincomalee, the Hindus of Batticaloa were not slow to follow their brethren in other provinces. The Vivekananda Society there was running a few schools for the benefit of local students. The managers of these schools thought it best to transfer their management to Ramakrishna Mission. The management of five such schools were made over to Swami Vipulananda in May 1925 — two of which, as stated earlier, were founded by Sister Avabhamiya in 1912. With a view to enlighten girls by imparting liberal education based on Hindu Culture, the foundation for the first Hindu Girls' School was laid by Swami Vipulananda in Karaitivu in October 1925. This was followed by laying of the foundation for Hindu Boys' English School in November 1925. These two schools became fully functional under the Mission by the year 1929 and came to be known as 'Sarada Vidyalaya' and 'Shivananda Vidyalaya' respectively. Further, two Tamil Schools at Kalladi Uppodai and Morokkottan-chenai respectively, and a 15 acre piece of land were handed over to the Mission by the descendants of a devotee based in Kalladi Uppodai. As stated earlier, in November 1929 the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home of Jaffna was shifted to Batticaloa for the availability of favourable conditions there for the growth and stability of the Home. The Mission's activities speedily spread in Batticaloa due to the active support of the devoted people.

Thus, within a short span of five years (1925-1930) the Mission came to manage 14 schools and an orphanage, with a teaching staff of about 65

teachers and thousands of students on roll. Of these schools, 10 were in Batticaloa, 2 in Trincomalee, and 2 in Jaffna. The establishment of these schools, especially in Batticaloa and Trincomalee, were a great boon to the people of that region, for the people had to otherwise send their children to either Jaffna or Colombo.

The accordance of legal status to Ramakrishna Mission

During these years, as the Movement began to gain confidence of the Ceylonese society, people began to donate properties to the Mission, which used to be managed by Swami Vipulananda and Swami Sharvananda. And consequent to the growing activities of the Mission, the necessity to give it a legal status was strongly being felt. Therefore, under the initiative of Swami Avinashananda, Hon. M. M. Subramaniam, who represented Trincomalee Revenue District in the Legislative Council, presented a Bill for the Incorporation of Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch) in 1928. The Bill was passed on 17 July 1929 by His Excellency Sir Herbert Stanley, the then Governor of Ceylon. With this statutory support, the Mission could thenceforth launch its projects in a legally safe milieu.

The Mission's centre in Colombo

Meanwhile, some leading residents of Colombo were urging the Mission authorities in India to open a centre in Colombo, the premier city of the Island. In response to their request Swami Sharvananda, accompanied by Swami Pranaveshananda, arrived in Colombo in October 1930. The first meeting of the Mission's centre in Colombo was held in the house of Mr. Mootatamby at 119 Rosemead Place, Colombo-7, and the decision to rent a house, which would function as the Ramakrishna Mission, was taken. Accordingly a house named 'Kamalyn' at 48 Harmer's Avenue, Wellawatta, was rented for the purpose. The centre was inaugurated on 22 October 1930 and it began to function as the headquarters of Ramakrishna Mission in Ceylon. Owing to financial difficulties, the centre was subsequently shifted in January 1932 to 49 Wickrema Road (now International Buddhist Centre Road), and then to its present site at 40 Ramakrishna Road, Colombo-6.

In 1931 Swami Vipulananda left for Tamil Nadu to become the first Tamil professor of the Annamalai University there. Swami Vipulananda was overseeing the multifarious activities of the Movement in the Island till the centre at Colombo was established. Once the Colombo Centre came into being, it was made the headquarters of Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch) and the swami-in-charge of Colombo Centre was invested with the responsibility of overseeing the activities of the Movement in the Island. The President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur, Calcutta, appoints the President and the Vice-President of Ramakrishna Mission (Ceylon Branch). And one who is nominated as Vice-President of the Colombo Centre functions as the swami-in-charge of all the activities of Ramakrishna Mission in Ceylon. Swami Ghanananda was the first Swami-in-charge appointed in 1931. He continued till 1932 when he left for India. He was succeeded by Swami Asangananda in the year 1933.* Towards the later part of 1933 Swami Vipulananda returned from Tamil Nadu and assumed the duty of the manager of schools for the second time.

Swami Vijnanananda's visit to Ceylon

A memorable event took place in 1934. It was the first visit of Swami Vijnanananda to Ceylon. Swami Vijnanananda was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He reached Colombo on 27 December 1933 where he was given a grand reception by the devotees and admirers of the Movement. He visited different places, including Trincomalee and Anuradhapuram, and reached Batticaloa Centre on 3 January 1934. This was a great day for all those who were connected with the activities of Ramakrishna Mission in the Island. Swami Natarajananda reminisces:

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* In 1941 he left for India handing over the charge to Swami Siddhatmananda. Swami Siddhatmananda continued till 1951 when he was succeeded again by Swami Asangananda. Swami Asangananda left for India in 1953 for reasons of health. Swami Prematmananda took charge of the centre from him in September 1954. In July 1987 Swami Samprajnananda succeeded him and continued till he passed away in May 1990. Swami Jivanananda looked after the activities from July 1990. In June 1991 Swami Atmaghanananda took charge of the centre and still continues.

> Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj, in an exalted mood, stood near the mango tree which was on the eastern side of Shivananda Vidyalaya and held his arms fully outstretched and said, 'This institution will grow thus! and thus!! and thus!!!' Every time he uttered the word 'thus' his arms opened out as if to enclose the entire void in his embrace.

His blessings did have their rare effect, for immediately in the wake of his visit, there was a spate of activities further influencing the Ceylonese society. He stayed in Ceylon for barely eleven days, but his stay gave much impetus to the growth and activities of the Mission.

Colombo Centre's new premises and the birth centenary of Sri Ramakrishna

The activities of the Mission at Colombo were increasing and it became necessary to find more spacious premises to provide for a shrine, office, and living quarters for the resident swamis. In February 1935 a small piece of land was purchased at 44 Wellawatta, and the construction of a suitable building was commenced in March 1935. Swami Asangananda laid the foundation stone for the present headquarters of the Mission on 6 March 1935, which also marked the first day of the inauguration of the birth centenary of Sri Ramakrishna. The construction of the Sri Ramakrishna Birth Centenary Temple was completed in the year 1936. It was dedicated two years later.

The birth-centenary celebration of Sri Ramakrishna was an ideal occasion for the Mission to spread its ideals and message among the masses, which it did in a commendable way. Apart from the usual meetings that were organized, more activities of a permanent nature took place. New schools were opened and new buildings to existing schools were added. Among the other notable events was the opening of Ramakrishna Mission Girls' Home (orphanage) at Karaitivu in January 1937.

Parallel developments in Batticaloa

During this period, in 1935, a residential section for the paying students of the Shivananda Vidyalaya was opened in two halls built for the purpose. The hostel buildings were named as 'Kamalalayam'. The hostel, to start with,

had only 12 inmates with 2 resident teachers to supervise them. The pattern of life followed in the hostel was the same as in Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Kalladi Uppodai, which was being run on the basis of *gurukula* system, providing all-round training to its inmates. The hostel catered to students of all religious denominations. The inmates in the hostel were encouraged to follow their own religious tenets in their traditional way.

Developments during the Second World War

During this time several requests started coming from the Hindu community for the opening of more schools under the Mission. But owing to war and consequent restrictions, the response to these appeals had to be postponed. In September 1939 Swami Vipulananda, who was intimately connected with the activities in Ceylon, was asked by the headquarters at Belur to take up the Editorship of *Prabuddha Bharata*. Swami Nishkamananda then succeeded him as the manager of the schools. The Second World War, especially the Japanese invasion of Singapore and Burma, caused much hardship to the people of Ceylon and disturbed the service activities of Ramakrishna Mission. In 1943 Swami Vipulananda was invited to take up the first Chair of Tamil at the University of Ceylon, and he became the first professor of Tamil in the Island. He passed away on 19 July 1947, thus bringing to an end nearly three decades of untiring service to Ramakrishna Mission and to the people of India and Ceylon. His contribution to the Tamil literature was also remarkable.

In July 1953 the Ramakrishna Mission Matham came into being at Kathirgamam. Kathirgamam is situated in the midst of a densely forested cluster of hills. It is the abode of Lord Murugan which attracts pilgrims from all parts of the Island throughout the year. As there were no arrangements for lodging and food, the Mission started its humanitarian work there in a humble way in 1943. By 1953 it became a very active centre rendering service to large number of people. During festive seasons the centre used to provide free food to about 10,000 pilgrims every day. The Mission continued this noble service under the supervision of Swami Sarvatitananda till it was taken over by the Government in November 1976.

The end of the second phase

In 1948 Ceylon became an independent country after having been under British rule for about 150 years. The emergence of this new political situation, in which the Mission was to function thenceforth, led to the end of the second phase. Nevertheless, by this time the Mission's activities had taken deep roots in the soil of Ceylon.

In August 1952, with a view to providing the Hindu children with a general background of their religion, the centre at Colombo started a Sunday School with just 15 students on roll. The following year (1953) witnessed the celebration of Sri Sarada Devi's birth centenary. It was marked by various programmes of both temporary as well as permanent nature.

Nature's fury had been regularly leaving its mark on the Island from time to time, especially on its eastern coast, and one such was seen in 1957. In the last week of December 1957 there were heavy floods causing damage to life and property in the eastern province. The Mission, through its centre at Batticaloa, immediately undertook relief operations in the affected areas. In May 1958, at the invitation of the Government Agent (Batticaloa district), it undertook the responsibility of running a refugee camp at Shivananda Vidyalaya premises for the victims of civil disturbances in that year. The selfless service rendered by the Mission on these two occasions was well appreciated both by the public and the Government.

Right from the beginning of this phase the Mission's activities steadily grew, and by the end of 1950s it was managing as many as 26 schools. But very soon it had to confront a new development which brought about a radical change in its role in the following decades. Ceylon's independence from British rule in 1948 had resulted in the introduction of new statutory resolutions and policies in the running of the free country. In July 1960, the Government of Ceylon enacted the 'National Education Bill' which empowered the Government to takeover all assisted denomination schools under private management which could not be run without Government grant. Consequently, all the 26 Mission Schools became State Schools from 1 December 1960. With this came to an end a glorious era of educational service of Ramakrishna Mission in Ceylon.

During this second phase, which had begun with the appearance of Swami Vipulananda on the scene, the Movement took deep roots and grew diversely

in fulfilling the vision of its founder-leader, Swami Vivekananda. Functioning through its different centres, it could reach a vast section of Ceylonese society through the cluster of educational institutions it founded in the different parts of the Island. Generations of young minds were moulded in these institutions in the broad ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and everywhere the seeds of harmony and peace were sowed. The act of taking over the Mission Schools by the Government put an end to this noble service.

The Third Phase (From 1960 onward) : In Cultural and Spiritual Fields

With the takeover of Mission's educational institutions by the Government in 1960, Mission's role in the post-1960 decades assumed a new form. While in the second phase it had laid emphasis on educational work, in the third it began to concentrate on spiritual and cultural work. The educational work too continued, but on a much smaller scale. In this phase it started Sunday schools which, among other things, provided training to teachers. In addition to frequent seminars and lectures at schools, it started conducting residential camps for school children and youth to inculcate in them moral values and to induce an overall development in them. It started granting financial assistance to the poor students. In the year 2000, the annual expenditure on this account exceeded one million rupees. In this phase we find the Mission actively discharging the role of a spiritual agent through its sacred forums in the Island by conducting discourses, dialogues, classes, and religious conferences.

This phase stands flanked by two major events — the 1963 Swami Vivekananda birth-centenary celebration, and the 1997 celebration commemorating the centenary of Swamiji's visit to the Island. Both the celebrations were conducted on a grand scale.

Growth of Mission's Centre at Colombo

In October 1962 an International Cultural Centre was declared open in the Colombo Centre by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India. It provides accommodation to guests and tourists from abroad and also to outstation students. Adjacent to this Cultural Centre, a magnificent hall, the biggest of its kind in the Island, was erected in 1969 to commemorate the birth

centenary of Swami Vivekananda. Since then the Cultural Centre and the Hall have been serving as a venue for many inter-religious dialogues and conferences. The third phase of the Movement thus witnessed a steady growth in its spiritual and cultural activities. But it suffered also some setbacks.

In the post-1980 years, the Mission had to function in a trying socio-political situation. The 1980s witnessed recurring tension between the Sri Lankan Government and the Tamils, the latter demanding a separate homeland for themselves in Sri Lanka. The tension continued throughout the decade, repeatedly erupting into violence. The Island was in the grip of terror and destruction. The Mission too had to bear the brunt of this ethnic strife. Its Colombo Centre became the target of a senseless attack by a rioting mob in the last week of July 1983, causing damage to its buildings and property. Nevertheless, due to the Mission's non-political and non-communal character, it stood as a centre of peace and harmony in the strife-torn scenario. Thousands of refugees from Sri Lanka were provided with primary as well as long-term relief by our centre in Madras. Hundreds of Sri Lankan refugee children were admitted into the local schools in Tamil Nadu and many were absorbed into the Students' Home in Madras. The Mission thus waded through the difficult 1980s.

Though the ethnic issue remained unresolved, the 1990s witnessed an improved socio-political and ethnic situation in the Island. The Sunday school in Colombo, which was started earlier in the second phase in 1952 with just 15 students on roll, steadily grew during the third phase to become immensely popular among the people. Today it is attended by 700 students guided by a band of more than 50 dedicated teachers. The Mission also supported the starting of two Saturday Religious School — one for the inmates of Colombo Hindu College Hostel at Ratmalanai in 1998 and one for the students of Nugegoda Tamil Maha Vidyalayam in 2001. All this bespeak of the trust which the Islanders repose in the Mission's humanitarian and spiritual work, hoping to slowly bring about lasting peace and social transformation.

Apart from these activities in the cultural and educational fields, the Colombo Centre conducts free medical camps benefiting thousands of poor patients. In October 1995 it started a free medical clinic. As stated earlier, the year 1997 was the occasion of the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's visit to the Island. To commemorate this event the 'Vivekanandapuram Housing Project' was undertaken at the cost of 3.4 million rupees. The centre constructed

a model village with 27 houses for the sanitary labourers displaced by ethnic violence. The village has a nursery school, a community hall, a children's park, a network of gravel roads, and a temple.

Relief and rehabilitation work is one of the major social welfare activities of Ramakrishna Mission. Since its inception, the Colombo Mission has carried out several relief operations, including housing projects, for several thousands of people affected by natural and other calamities. We have already mentioned about the flood havoc of 1957 and the civil disturbances of 1958, during which the Mission had launched extensive relief work. In 1978 it launched a cyclone relief operation in the Island's eastern province. In recent years the Mission was involved in the drought relief work in Hambantota in 2001, flood relief work in Ratnapura in 2003, and in a massive relief operation in the wake of the deadly tsunami of 2004. These relief activities were highly appreciated by the public as well as the Government.

Growth of the Mission's Centre at Batticaloa

The Batticaloa centre also maintained its steady growth through these decades. With the takeover of the schools by the Government, it too diverted its attention to cultural and spiritual activities. As a continuation of its educational activities it started a Sunday school in 1963. Swami Jivanananda became the manager of the orphanages and the centre at Batticoloa in 1967 (and he still continues). In 1976 the boys' orphanage there celebrated its fiftieth year. Unfortunately, very soon the centre had to pass an ordeal and suffer a setback. As stated earlier, a devastating cyclone hit the eastern coast of the Island in 1978 and caused untold calamity, putting a temporary halt to the centre's activities. The entire province was devastated beyond description, and the buildings of Batticaloa centre were badly ravaged. The loss was colossal. What took almost half a century to build had been brought to naught within ten hours.

On this occasion the Batticaloa centre could not actively engage in relief operations as on previous occasions, because the centre itself was one of the victims of the cyclone. In spite of that, with the help of Colombo and Madras centres, relief items were sent to ten affected villages. In due course, with the help of other welfare associations, numerous devotees and sympathizers of the Mission, the centre could gradually regain its original stature.

In the ethnic-strife-torn 1980s, the Batticaloa Centre, like the centre in Colombo, stood as a centre of peace and harmony. Today it conducts regular worship, weekly religious classes for women, a Sunday school for children, and religious meetings in the premises of the centre as well as in many schools within the Batticaloa Municipal limits. The centre runs three orphanages — a Home for Boys at Kalladi Uppodai and two Girls' Homes, one at Anaipanthy, Batticaloa, and the other at Karaitivu. With a view to providing scientific training to the inmates of the orphanages and making the Home self-supportive, an agricultural farm is being run by the Mission at Rugam (Batticaloa district).

These orphanages today stand as a shinning example of selfless dedication and charity for the cause of poor orphans. It has become a role model for others to emulate. If we look hundred years back into the then benighted Batticaloa, we can form an idea of the contributions of Ramakrishna Movement in ushering the region in a new age.

Conclusion

A careful review of the Movement will make explicit the fact that it had played three distinctive roles in its three phases of development in the Island. During the first phase it had to play the role of an awakener, for the Island was then awakened by the pioneering swamis to an ideal which it had long forgotten in course of the preceding dark centuries of its history. In the second phase it was more an organizer, canalizing the Island's awakened social forces in proper direction. And today, in its third phase, it stands as a beacon of spiritual light amidst the new types of challenges emerging from a fast changing society with strong materialistic ethos.

Thus, from its humble beginning in 1897, the Ramakrishna Movement in Sri Lanka steadily grew through the chequered decades of the twentieth century. And in course of its growth it silently cast a sublime influence on the Island by lighting the torch of education in its different parts. Though today it has been divested of its involvement in the educational institutions it had once set, it continues to perform its role in cultural and spiritual fields. The Movement has today made a home for itself in the hearts of millions of Sri Lankans, and we can expect it to play an equally promising role in future.*

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* Information collected from the Souvenirs of Colombo and Batticaloa Centres.

Ramakrishna Movement in Malaysia

SWAMI MUKTIRUPANANDA

India has, centuries ago, left her clear footprints in Malaysia and South-East Asia. As far back as third century AD the Indian merchant ships touched the shores of Malay Archipelago. The maritime trade brought this region under the imperceptible influence of Indian cultural and religio-political ideas. Some old inscriptions found in Malaysia are heavily Sanskritized and even today its vocabulary consists of many Sanskrit words. Earlier, only a few thousand Indians lived there. The flow of migration from India began in the later part of the nineteenth century, during the British rule. Thousands of Indians entered Malaysia, mainly from Tamil Nadu, to work in rubber plantations, coffee estates, and public works.

The ship 'Peninsular' carrying Swami Vivekananda, who was on his way to Chicago in June 1893, reached the Penang port in Malaysia probably in the second week of June. In his letter to Alasinga Perumal, dated 10 July 1893, Swamiji briefly refers to his landing at Penang. No details are available about what he did in Penang. It is said that he visited the Botanical Gardens and may have talked to few Indian merchants settled in that town. The great sage set his foot on the Malayan soil. That was the beginning. Later his flaming speeches at the Parliament of Religions and in India set the hearts of Malay Indians on fire. Many Hindus inspired by his fiery words organized themselves to spread his rejuvenating message. Thus began the Ramakrishna Movement in Malaysia, a century ago, spreading its branches to the far corners of the country.

The First Vivekananda Ashrama, Kuala Lumpur

In 1904 a group of fourteen Indians started an organization called 'Vivekananda Ashrama' in Kuala Lumpur, to study and propagate the ideas of Swamiji. The early years of this Ashrama were confined to religious and cultural activities. Land was acquired in Brickfields and a hall was constructed to serve as the nucleus of the Ashrama. At the devotees' request Swami Sharvananda, then President of the Madras Math, came to Malaysia in 1913 and kindled the interest of the people. He paid a second visit in 1919. Then followed a series of visits by several Swamis — Abhedananda, Prakashananda, Paramananda and others. In 1914 the Ashrama started the Vivekananda Tamil School. Later Swami Videhananda came from Belur Math in 1919 to head the centre. A few years later a dispute arose between the trustees of the school and Swami Videhananda over the ownership of the school. The court ruled in favour of the trustees and the Swami left the Ashrama in March 1925. Thus the Vivekananda Ashrama ceased to be an affiliated centre of Belur Math. Since then the Ashrama has been functioning as an independent institution. Today it runs many schools. In 1993 the Ashrama installed a majestic bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda in front of its building.

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Penang

In 1935 a welfare home was started in Penang to provide shelter and education to the orphan and needy children of Indian origin. This welfare home was officially inaugurated by Swami Bhaswarananda in November 1938 and named 'Ramakrishna Ashrama'. This Ashrama engaged itself in many religious and charitable activities. After the war in 1947 the orphan girls from Singapore Ramakrishna Mission were sent to this Ashrama. To

meet the needs of the increasing number of poor and orphan boys and girls the devotees built spacious buildings to house them. To strengthen its spiritual activities the Ashrama, in 1968, built a Ramakrishna Temple with a marble image of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vireswarananda, the tenth President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated it. Now the Ashrama runs a Kindergarten also. It currently houses about 70 needy boys and girls. From a humble beginning in a small shed it has grown into the biggest institution in Malaysia. Swamis of the Ramakrishna order often visit this centre.

Ramakrishna Society, Seremban

In the 1960s a small group of devotees at Seremban had been meeting to study the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. The members of the group kept regular contact with the Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore. The visiting swamis also went to Seremban and kept the spiritual flame burning. This society was registered in 1967. For 32 years the society functioned in rented premises. Later a spacious building was built and consecrated in 2003. Now all its activities are conducted in its own premises.

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Melaka

This Ashrama was established by Dr. Rama in 1962. In 1991 an Ashrama complex was built. It runs an orphanage for poor and destitute children. Mr. Govindaswamy, who assumed the leadership of the Ashrama, energetically spread the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna till his death in 1997.

Sri Ramakrishna Society, Complex Felda Palong

Complex Felda Palong is an estate about 110 kilometres from Seremban city. It is in the interior of the country. This area was formerly a forest, which was cleared by the government for the cultivation of rubber and palm oil. In that remote area, under the leadership of a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Mr. Sugumaran, a few Indian families regularly met and studied scriptures and the

teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. After several years the devotees organized themselves and formed a Ramakrishna Society, which was registered in 1993. Many swamis of the Ramakrishna Order have visited this Centre.

Ramakrishna Divya Sangam, Jelapang

This private centre was started by a group of devotees under the leadership of Mrs. Thanam in 1996. She had initially started spreading the message of Sri Ramakrishna by distributing to devotees *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, the Tamil monthly journal published by Ramakrishna Math, Madras. They have now built a small Sri Ramakrishna Temple. This Divya Sangam is a registered institution. They celebrate the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna every year on a grand scale with procession.

Sri Ramakrishna Panimandrum, Kluang

Several devotees meet regularly in a rented hall in Kluang to study, worship and sing devotional songs. In the hall there is a shrine for Sri Ramakrishna. Many swamis of our Order visit this private centre. It is about 110 kilometres from Singapore.

Persatuan Penganut Deva Ramakrishna Sungei Siput

In this private centre devotees meet and study, worship, sing devotional songs, and observe the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna.

Vivekananda Youth Movement, Seremban

In 1984, a group of youths inspired by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda organized seminars and camps for young people to instil in their minds Swamiji's immortal message. In 1997 this youth organization was registered. These young people are active in social service and charitable activities. To help the tsunami victims they raised funds and collected substantial relief materials. Now they have set up a home for poor boys.

Persatuan Sri Ramakrishna Sarada, Kuala Lumpur

In October 1959, a group of devotees in Kuala Lumpur established the Ramakrishna Society in the presence of Swami Siddhatmananda, the then president of the Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore. In course of time it invited many senior swamis of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Ranganathananda inaugurated the Sarada Sangha for women in 1960. For few years the Sarada Sangha conducted a small home for girls. Tun Sambanthan, the leader of Indian Community, played an outstanding role in founding and developing this institution. In 1977 the two organizations were merged and renamed as 'Persatuan Sri Ramakrishna Sarada'. From its inception it had maintained close relationship with the Singapore Centre. In 1999 this organization built a Ramakrishna Temple and monks' quarters at Petaling-Jaya, Kuala Lumpur. It was affiliated in August 2000 and became an official centre of Belur Math. Swami Tanmayananda, as a resident monk, consolidated the activities of the various private centres in Malaysia during his five-year tenure. Owing to visa restrictions, he left the centre in February 2006. The present incumbent, Swami Veerabhadrananda, took charge of the centre in July 2006. At present this is the only affiliated centre of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in Malaysia. At present the main activities of the centre are: conducting daily worship, singing of devotional songs, celebration of the birthdays of the Holy Trio, cultural programmes for youth, weekly discourses, etc. Pecuniary help is provided to a few young students for education, and to a few poor people in the surrounding villages suffering from various physical ailments. The centre maintains a library and bookstall. The swami-in-charge goes on extensive lecture tours.

The Ramakrishna Movement in Malaysia, begun a century ago, has been growing stronger and stronger. The tremendous power unleashed by Sri Ramakrishna is bringing light, love and peace to thousands in that country.

Ramakrishna Movement in Singapore, Mauritius, Fiji, and Japan

SWAMI MEDHASANANDA

From the second through the fifth decades of the twentieth century, the Ramakrishna Movement was established in Singapore, Mauritius, Fiji, and Japan. The following account of the Ramakrishna Movement in these countries forms an essential part of the study of a great spiritual movement.

Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore

The name 'Singapore' is derived from Sanskrit, meaning 'Lion City'. Formerly part of Malaya, this city-state in the Indian Ocean is one of the world's busiest entrepots. Singaporeans of Chinese descent form the overwhelming majority of the population, with Malays, Indians, and Eurasians following respectively. The Island's main languages are English, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil, and the major religions are Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. The Ramakrishna Mission's centre at Singapore, started and affiliated in 1928, is now situated on Bartley Road on five acres of land. In addition to conducting daily worship in the spacious shrine and the holding of religious celebrations, it also runs a Boys' Home, a counselling centre, a kindergarten, a homeopathic dispensary, and a library. The centre also holds religious discourses and publishes a quarterly magazine called *Nirvana*.

Origin and Growth

Historically speaking, most of the Southeast Asian countries had close religious, cultural, and commercial ties with India from the early centuries of the Christian era. At that time, most of the people of this region embraced either Hinduism or Buddhism. With the passage of time and the growing influence of Muslims, and the subsequent conversion of large numbers of local people to Islam during the Middle Ages, however, these ties with India withered. Later, Europeans colonized and modernized much of the area that includes Singapore, which is situated at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula at the entrance to the Straits of Malacca.

In 1819, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, agent to the British East India Company, established a trade depot at Singapore, which was then only a cluster of swampy Malay fishing villages. The original inhabitants of the island were mostly Malay and a few Chinese. Within the five years from 1819 to 1824, the population multiplied rapidly, and by 1829 the island was made a British Colony. Singapore's growing fame as a business centre attracted more immigrants from India and China who were interested in trade and business and the many types of employment these activities bring. Among the 10,683 people who settled there, 756 Indians, mostly labourers and convicts sent from Penang and Malacca, represented about seven percent of the population. These were the beginnings of Chinese and Indian settlement of modern Singapore, which flourished after British colonization to become a major business centre and port of great strategic importance for the entire region.

Swami Vivekananda visited some places of interest in Singapore during a brief stopover in June 1893 on his way to the United States to address the Parliament of Religions. In 1913, within two decades of this visit, some admirers of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda had already formed a group. This group invited Swami Sharvananda, then head of the Madras Ramakrishna Math and an eloquent speaker, to visit Singapore and Malaysia. His visits, and the inspired talks given to these devotees by Swami Abhedananda during his final return to India from the West, and by Swami Prakashananda in 1921, laid the groundwork for the foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission in Singapore. In response to the repeated requests from local devotees to send

a swami to start a centre for the Mission, Swami Adyananda, an initiated disciple of Swami Shivananda, was sent to Singapore by Mission Headquarters.

Swami Adyananda inaugurated the new centre on 9 August 1928. The ground floor of the first building of the centre was constructed in 1930 on a piece of land at 9 Norris Road, which had been donated by the Arya Sangam, a local Indian association formed in 1919 for promoting Vedic culture. The Swami then opened a Tamil school in 1932, called Vivekananda School, which attracted an increasing number of students from among the Indian community.

Swami Bhaswarananda took charge of the centre from Swami Adyananda in 1933. The tenure of this new President, which lasted some fourteen years, was marked by various events, some of which had far-reaching consequences. He opened a night school for poor workers in 1935 and also started the Saradamani Girls' school in 1937 to meet the increasing demand for accommodating young female students.

The Youngmen's Cultural Union was formed in 1930 to infuse moral and spiritual values among local youth. Membership to the Union was open to all young men without exception and received a favourable response in the community. Lectures and group discussions on cultural topics and musical concerts were organized by the young members. They also began publishing a magazine called *Culture*. Such activities helped these youngsters grow into young men of dynamic character and sharp intellect. The smooth functioning and gradual expansion of the centre were seriously affected when Singapore became a victim of the Second World War. The Japanese Army bombed and finally annexed the British-occupied Singapore on 19 February 1942, when the British surrendered. The Japanese occupation of Singapore was punctuated by more bombing by Allied Forces until it was re-occupied by the British in 1945.

The war shattered all normalcy that had prevailed in Singapore and every aspect of life was adversely affected. Casualties and loss of property were common. Consequently, all regular activities of the centre came to a halt. The main tasks before the Swami during these days of crises were to ensure the survival of the Mission by carrying on a minimum of spiritual programmes at the ashrama, while rendering humanitarian aid and service to the victims of war. The Swami rose to the occasion on both counts and showed extraordinary courage and great wisdom in guiding the Mission during these perilous times.

About 560 people were given shelter on the Mission grounds and first-aid provided to the victims of air raids. An 80-bed hospital, two outdoor dispensaries, and a relief camp for the destitute were opened providing medical aid to the sick and wounded alongside distribution of food, clothing, and other provisions to the needy and homeless.

While all these services — though of great importance — were of a temporary nature, one step taken during this time became a permanent function of the Mission. This was the opening of a home for orphans, which, initially meant for both boys and girls, has operated as a boys' orphanage since 1947. The orphanage was necessitated by the forced recruitment of Indian and other labourers for the Japanese military's Siam-Burma 'Death' Railway, and this action left many Indian children helpless and destitute. To accommodate these children and to help future expansion of the centre, a tract of 5.73 acres of land was purchased in 1942 at 179 Bartley Road, and a children's home was established there.

Many devotees and well-wishers of the Mission, the most celebrated of whom was Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, came forward to help with the foundation and running of the home. As the Supreme Commander of the Indian National Army, Netaji — whose aim was to oust the British Imperialists from India with Japanese help — was living in Singapore between 1943 and 1944. It was during this time that he sometimes visited the Mission's temple on Norris Road late at night to pray and meditate in privacy. When an appeal was made to Netaji to help establish the home, he personally made a substantial donation for erecting semi-permanent dormitories, one of which he officially opened.

Swami Bhaswarananda left Singapore in 1947 after the situation began to show improvement with the end of war. His heroic service during those days of crises made him not only a memorable character in the history of Singapore in general, but a hero in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement in particular.

During the period between Swami Bhaswarananda's departure in 1947 and Swami Siddhatmananda's arrival in 1959, the centre witnessed a rapid succession of swamis. In order of their arrival, the centre was headed by Swamis Vamadevananda, Nishkamananda, Vitashokananda, and Ekatmananda. Generally speaking, such frequent changes are not conducive to the stable and smooth functioning of such an institution, and especially so for one that had

suffered as the Singapore Mission had during the war. Consequently, the observation and continuance of policies vital to the credibility of such an institution could not always be observed. The Industrial School, which had been opened in 1948 for training in tailoring, carpentry, toy making, basket weaving, etc., and the Ramakrishna School, a kindergarten opened in 1949, were later closed. The once well-managed and highly-reputed boys' and girls' schools of the Mission were no longer operating smoothly.

By 1967, these were all merged into one school, and by 1979, that too was closed owing to the failure of the centre to cope with changes in the government's educational policies. The situation deteriorated further until, finally, the whole campus at Norris Road, which was situated in the very heart of the city, was sold. This proved to be a serious error, since the closure of the schools deprived the Mission of the means to serve the Indian community as a whole.

The activities of the Mission's Bartley Road campus were receiving greater attention from the heads of the centre during the post war years and, thanks to a lump sum donation from Mr. Govindaswamy Pillai, construction of the Ramakrishna Temple was made possible in 1952. The construction and ceremonial opening of this temple during the presidency of Swami Vamadevananda was an important step towards the consolidation of the Mission's activities, not only on Bartley Road, but for the whole of the Ramakrishna Movement in Singapore.

Swami Siddhatmananda then served the centre with great zeal and devotion for more than two decades after 1959. And although it was during his tenure that the painful decisions to close educational facilities ware made, it is equally true that the Mission consolidated its activities and established itself in the fields of religion and culture on more solid ground.

To his credit as a visionary and organizer, it may be said that he was responsible for many important functions, namely the centenary celebration of Swami Vivekananda in 1963, the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the centre in 1979, and the Parliament of Religions in the same year. The centenary celebration of Swami Vivekananda's birth alone laid the groundwork for the construction of the Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Building in 1964, which later housed an auditorium and a library among other things. These programmes, and the visits of many dignitaries from India and Singapore to attend

these functions, brought the centre into the limelight, and soon there were requests to organize symposiums, seminars, and retreats in the ashrama auditorium. The hosting of the Parliament of Religions was especially helpful in disseminating the universal and elevating message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Vedanta among the local intelligentsia.

On his visit to the ashrama in 1965, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew expressed his view that the Mission's activities would make the people of Singapore more tolerant of each other. This, he said, would ultimately serve to bring about the emergence of a multi-racial society with common values and, thus, a more common culture. During this time, the centre received substantial donations from dignitaries of the Indian Government on a number of occasions which proved to be of great support in the centre's bid for renovation and other construction projects. After serving the Singapore Mission for many years, Swami Siddhatmananda passed away in that city in 1980. He was universally loved and respected by the local community for his dedicated life, charming personality, and organizing capacity. Swami Sthitananda, the only monk to have joined the Order from Singapore hitherto, acted as head for a year following Swami Siddhatmananda's death. His term was followed by Swamis Shastrananda, Shiveswarananda, Parasarananda, and Jayadevananda.

Swami Jayadevananda was appointed head of the Mission in 1992 and continued until 1996. He, in cooperation with his able monastic assistants, sparked a number of projects which gave new impetus to the Movement. In the centre's bid to search out new avenues of service in the highly complicated social milieu of modern times, the Mission once again stepped into the educational sector by opening the Sarada Kindergarten in 1993. Though this institution is smaller than its predecessor, it is characterized by its universal nature and sophisticated systems. Today (2003-04) it has around 500 children. In addition to this, a homeopathic dispensary was started in the same year. Counselling services are rendered to youths by professional counsellors under the auspices of the centre. The centenary celebrations to mark Swamiji's visit to Singapore and Penang in 1893 and his historic appearance at the Chicago Parliament of Religions were held in that year. Publication of a quarterly called *Nirvana* was begun in 1994. More importantly, the sale of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature by the Mission at annual book fairs has proved to be a

very effective means of reaching out to the non-Indian residents of Singapore, especially the large Chinese segment of the population. The message conveyed by the literature sold at these fairs to the people from all walks of life is hoped to leave an impression on their minds, though they may not visit the centre itself.

Swami Jayadevananda left for India in October 1996 and Swami Jagadatmananda took over the charge of the centre.[1] He headed the centre for three years mainly consolidating and further strengthening the institutions and projects started by his predecessor. In 1999 Swami Muktirupananda assumed the President's office and still continues.[2] He added a Multi-Purpose Building in October 2002 which provides additional classrooms, a gymnasium and language laboratory supplementing the existing facilities at the Sarada Kindergarten. This new building also houses the Wings Counselling Centre, the Mission's community service that has shown considerable expansion in the last few years.[3]

Ramakrishna Mission, Mauritius

Coral-ringed Mauritius, named after King Maurice Van Nassau of Holland, is a small island in the Indian Ocean. The composition of this country's population is quite mixed, with Indian Mauritians at about 67%, Africans, Europeans, and mixed Euro-Africans at 28%, and Chinese at 2%. The main languages spoken are Bhojpuri, Hindi, Creole (the language of the African and mixed Afro-Europeans), English, and French. The country's major religions are Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam.

The centre, started in 1940 and affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission in 1941, is now situated in Vacaos. The main centre has an area of six acres, and the sub-centre has an area of half an acre of land. In addition, it owns fifty-four acres of agricultural land producing sugar.

Daily worship is conducted in the spacious temple where various religious celebrations are held regularly. Weekly religious classes and retreats are conducted at the centre and religious talks are given at different locations in the island. The centre also runs a public library, and the sub-centre at St. Julien D'Hotman runs an English-medium pre-primary school, a Hindi-medium primary school, and it also conducts weekly religious discourses.

Origin and Growth

The first human settlement in Mauritius started with the arrival of the Dutch in 1598, and the slave labour they later brought in from Madagascar to work in sugarcane agriculture borrowed from Batavia in 1650. The Dutch left the island in 1710, and within five years of their departure the French took possession of it. French occupation continued until 1810, when the island was annexed by the British. Under French rule the sugar industry had begun to flourish, and with the arrival of the British, sugar production was further increased. The main reason for this success was the region's ideal climate for growing sugarcane, and more importantly, sugarcane survives the onslaught of the region's typhoons far better than any other agricultural crop. But the real success of the sugar industry depended upon great numbers of labourers who were brought in from Africa and India. The British rulers, in particular, found it convenient to bring in cheap labour from India, which had become part of the British Empire.

Indentured immigration of Indians lasted from the third decade of the nineteenth century till around the second decade of the twentieth century. The number of Indians indentured to work in the sugarcane fields and factories of Mauritius over the years totalled some 450,000. Most of these labourers, from Bihar and other areas of eastern India, made the island their permanent home. Consequently, Indians form the largest ethnic community on Mauritius. The poor and simple labourers of Mauritius were ruthlessly exploited by their European employers, and the suffering of these people knew no bounds. This was witnessed by Mr. M. K. Gandhi, who later became the renowned Mahatma Gandhi, on his return to India from South Africa.

Gandhiji, deeply moved by the piteous condition of his people, sent a spirited and dynamic young Indian, Dr. Manilal, to Mauritius in 1907 to help improve conditions for the workers. It was Dr. Manilal who first realized that religious services would lift the downtrodden spirit of the Hindu community. Along with other efforts to ease their suffering, he became instrumental in founding a branch of the Arya Samaj in 1910. This helped infuse a spirit of optimism and awareness among these Indians. Following the path of its celebrated founder, Swami Dayananda, the Arya Samaj believed only in the work portion of the Vedas and wanted to reform Hindu religion and society

along that line. Mainstream Hinduism, however, is more comprehensive and follows not only the Vedas, but the Purāṇas and Tantras as well. As such, the Arya Samaj could not satisfy the religious needs and sentiments of the majority of the Hindus of Mauritius.

Moreover, the efforts of Christian missionaries to convert Hindus, especially the Tamilians, by hook or by crook, further alarmed the Hindu community. This resulted in a committee being formed to study the situation and find ways of defending the religion from the zealous onslaught of these Christians. It was in this connection that the Ramakrishna Mission Headquarters at Belur Math was contacted by Mr. Mootoocomaren Sangeelee, the secretary of this committee, requesting that a swami be sent to Mauritius 'for the preservation of Hinduism and the high values of Indian culture'.

This course of action was actually suggested by Mr. John de Lingen Kilbern, English master at the Royal College in Curepipe, Mauritius. Kilbern, a protagonist of Hinduism, was familiar with the ideals of the Ramakrishna Mission and appreciated its activities. The worldwide birth centenary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna in 1936 were also partly responsible for making a segment of the Mauritius Hindu population aware of the lives and teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. In response to Mr. Sangeelee's letter, the Ramakrishna Mission sent Swami Ghanananda to Mauritius in 1939. The Swami, having been initiated by Swami Shivananda, had a solid spiritual and intellectual background and was fit for the challenge of ushering the Ramakrishna Movement into the hostile environment of this new land.

The first public reception in honour of the Swami was held on Sunday, 30 July 1939, which was well attended. The Swami spoke, among other things, of the Vedantic concept of 'thou art That' and dwelt on the immortality of the soul and the oneness of mankind. This speech was given with such conviction that many in the audience felt the mission of the Swami should not only be appreciated, but also be fully supported. Thus was sown the seed of the Ramakrishna Movement in Mauritius, which in the course of time would grow into a mighty tree giving shelter and solace to innumerable souls.

The Swami gave lectures and sermons, organized by the Indian Cultural Organization, in quick succession. He also spoke to smaller cultural groups and private individuals. He was then invited by the Government to give talks on the Hindu religion and Indian culture at the Teacher's Training College and

State secondary colleges, where both Hindu and non-Hindu students were attracted by the Swami's eloquence. Students who had once been devout admirers of Western values and religious precepts came to discover the noble and profound truths and universal spirit of Hinduism through his words. A segment of the Mauritius elite, some of whom were of deep religious faith, were drawn to the Swami and patronized the activities of the Mission. One of these, Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo, later became the first President of the Republic of Mauritius. But Swami Ghanananda didn't confine his role to urban areas alone. He also carried the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda into the villages of rural Mauritius and gave talks on the *Ramayana* and the *Gita*. His talks, given in English, were simultaneously translated into Hindi, the only language the Indians in these rural areas knew.

In 1940, just one year after the Swami's arrival, the first campus of the centre was built in the village of Julien D' Hotman where he had first gone at the invitation of the Sanatan Dharma Sammelan Sabha. It was the generous patronage of M. Ramburrun, President of the Sammelan, that made this first building possible. However, things did not proceed smoothly with regard to the Swami's work in this land. The committee that had taken the initiative in bringing the Swami to Mauritius was not completely satisfied with him, and stated that they had hoped for a Hindu theologian who would also provide them with the services of a priest. To this proposition Swami Ghanananda reacted by stating clearly, 'I am a monk and not a priest.' Consequently, the committee declined to patronize the Swami and, further, requested him to return to India. The Swami refused to comply with this request and was determined not to leave Mauritius until the Ramakrishna Movement was firmly established there.

Swami Ghanananda's dream was soon fulfilled when a bill was passed by the Legislative Council in March of 1942 officially establishing the Ramakrishna Mission as a charitable and religious organization of Mauritius. The work of the Mission was further consolidated with the purchase of the property in Vacaos that became the main centre, with the sub-centre remaining at the original Julien D'Hotman site. The Swami also initiated other projects for which he went from door to door seeking support. These include the foundation of an orphanage in Vacaos in 1944 (discontinued in the mid 1960s), a Hindi school in 1945, the Sarada Society for Women, and the Ramayan Association

for the chanting and interpretation of the *Ramayana*, all in the village near the first centre. A dispensary was also opened in Port Louis in 1945. Voluntary services were provided there by a few doctors, one of whom, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, was to become the first Prime Minister of the independent Mauritius.

As indicated earlier, the path of Swami Ghanananda as the pioneer of the Ramakrishna Movement in Mauritius was not always a bed of roses. He was also criticized by a few individuals who, in view of his close association with Sir Ramgoolam, accused the Swami of meddling in politics. But these charges, maliciously motivated and levelled at the Swami, did not leave any lasting ill-effect on the devotees or well-wishers of the Movement. After a momentous, and at times beleaguered, six-and-a-half years, Swami Ghanananda left Mauritius for good in December of 1946, eventually to proceed to England where he founded another Vedanta centre. From the viewpoint of the Ramakrishna Movement, the Swami's stay there was very fruitful, and it was he who initiated almost all the activities, which were later continued by his successors. He was succeeded by Swami Nihshreyasananda in 1947.

This Swami too gave lectures extensively and inspired people everywhere in the land. His versatility and proficiency in English, working knowledge of Hindi (which he acquired after coming to Mauritius), deep knowledge of the scriptures and personal charm helped popularize the Movement and motivate some social and cultural leaders of the island nation. Swami Nihshreyasananda also strengthened the Mission's financial position by purchasing a huge tract of land for sugarcane and tea plantation. Given the time and effort that the operation of a successful plantation requires, some felt, however, this was a mixed blessing.

Swami Kritananda then took charge of the centre in 1949 and served for nearly two decades. In 1962 he started a high school in the ashrama premises, which was later closed, but a public library he opened still flourishes. The construction of the Ramakrishna Temple was an important event in the history of the Movement in Mauritius. It stands as a huge and beautiful architectural symbol of the spiritual foundation of the Movement, and it is destined to attract many people and bring them great good in years to come. Originally planned by Swami Tattwabodhananda (who replaced Swami Kritananda), the temple was completed in 1976. It was officially declared open by Swami

Vireswarananda, the tenth President of the Ramakrishna Order, and it marked the first visit of a President of the Order to Mauritius.

The annual worship of Mother Durga in image has become an important part of the regular programme at the ashrama and is being performed with great pomp and grandeur since the tenure of Swami Aparananda. This worship of Mother Durga is now one of the most appealing and popular religious events in the whole of Mauritius.

Swami Balaramananda, who succeeded Swami Purananda, gave a new dimension to the Movement by organizing the first Parliament of Religions in Mauritius. The holding of this event in such a multi-racial and multi-religious setting as Mauritius no doubt had a positive impact on the mutual relations of the people there. Also to his credit, the Swami started spiritual retreats for both male and female devotees, created the Sarada Sangha, an association for female devotees, and initiated the publication of the centre's quarterly bulletin on a regular basis. Swami Balaramananda suffered a massive heart attack and died in Mauritius in 1987.

He was succeeded by Swami Krishnarupananda in July 1987, who carries on the activities of the Mission with great vigour and enthusiasm. As with Swami Balaramananda, Krishnarupananda's command of both Hindi and English has helped the Movement spread to the grassroot level of the Indian community. The organizing of essay, recitation, and elocution competitions on topics suitable for college students, and the organizing of spiritual retreats for them as well, has contributed greatly to the dissemination of the ideas and ideals of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement among the youth of Mauritius. The formation of the Devotee Service Group to help keep the ashrama clean and beautiful provides young devotees with the opportunity to put into practice the high ideal of 'Work is Worship'. Bala Vikasa, an activity for the development of children, has been started recently, and weekly classes of hymns and bhajans are held to cultivate ethical and spiritual values in them. The Mission also renders some financial aid to needy people of the area.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Ramakrishna Mission in Mauritius was celebrated through a variety of programmes in 1992. In August 2000, the Mission there inaugurated its newly-built commodious retreat centre,[4] and taking all of the Mission's programmes and activities into consideration, it is evident that the Ramakrishna Movement will continue to flourish there.

Ramakrishna Mission, Nadi, Fiji

Fiji consists of two main islands and three hundred lesser ones located in the South Pacific. The main languages spoken there are English, Fijian, and Hindi, and its major religions are Hinduism and Christianity.

The centre, located in Nadi, was started in 1937 and was affiliated to the Mission in 1952. Daily worship, religious classes, congregational prayers, and religious festivals are held regularly. The centre also runs a high school, a primary school, a school for rural development, and a public library.

Origin and Growth

The history of the origin and growth of the Ramakrishna Movement in Fiji is almost identical to that of Mauritius. It begins with the Dutch navigator Abel Tasman discovering the inhabited Fiji islands in 1643. The native population then was divided into many tribes, and by the early 1800s many of these groups had been converted to Christianity by the Christian missionaries. Although the islands had a native king called 'Cokabau', with many chieftains subject to him, internal dissentions often disrupted normalcy in Fiji. Eventually the Fijian leadership decided to cede their country to British administration in 1874, seeing it as the only opportunity to bring about stability.

Here, too, sugarcane plantation was introduced, but the plantation owners considered the Fijians unfit for the demanding labour of the cane fields. Planters sought greater profits and began bringing in indentured labourers from India in collaboration with the British government. This brought great numbers of Indians into Fiji over the decades from 1879 to 1916. The total number of indentured Indian labourers reached 60,563, and the scores of Indian technicians, skilled workers, and businessmen who also arrived on Fiji's shores, created an immigrant population that finally outnumbered native Fijians. This displacement would have far-reaching effects on the future history of Fiji.

The conditions under which these Indian labourers toiled in the sugar fields of Fiji was just as inhumane as elsewhere, and the rampant exploitation of Indians by the estate owners continued here without redress until the arrival of Reverend C. F. Andrews. Reverend Andrews had spent time in India and had become close to Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. He was

universally loved and respected in India for his deep concern and sympathy for the suffering humanity irrespective of race, colour, or creed. The Reverend studied the appalling conditions in Fiji over the course of his three visits and was instrumental in improving the plight of the labourers to a great extent.

Continuing the welfare work begun by Reverend Andrews, Mr. Kuppuswami, a Fijian Indian of great dedication, founded TISI Sangam, an organization dedicated to that purpose. Not being fully satisfied with the aims and activities of this organization, he made a request to the Ramakrishna Mission authorities that a monk be sent to organize and revitalize the Sangam.

This led to Swami Avinashananda's arrival in Fiji in 1937. Though brief, his one year stay proved to be very effective. The Swami is remembered for organizing various welfare programmes for the Sangam and giving the group meaningful direction. He also campaigned hard for the education of Indian children. In 1939, the Mission Headquarters then sent Swami Rudrananda to consolidate and expand the work begun by Avinasananda. Though young, the new Swami had the strength of his convictions and was full of energy and constructive ideas. He proved to be both a visionary and a pragmatic man at the same time.

Swami Rudrananda first turned his attention to the education of Indian children. With only 34 students and two teachers he opened the Vivekananda High School in a small shed. Despite the hostile attitude of the British Government and other unfavourable circumstances, the little school began to flourish, attracting students from all sections of society, including farmers and native Fijians. Consisting of both boys and girls, at present the enrollment is 1200 strong. The Swami also opened another school, then called the Nadi Secondary School, to provide more advanced education. The successful experiment in private management by the Mission paved the way for many other schools to be opened later, and the centre opened a vocational school with agriculture and job-oriented courses such as auto mechanics for those who had failed to continue their schooling. Moreover, a primary school to educate the children of poor sugarcane farmers was set up.

The Swami also held discourses on the *Ramayana* and other Hindu scriptures. Despite the difficulty of reaching many of Fiji's islands, he travelled extensively to disseminate the life-giving message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Vedanta. He organized regular retreats to strengthen the spiritual

lives of the devotees and also travelled to Australia and New Zealand to preach. Though not directly related to the Ramakrishna Movement itself, his personal and undaunted struggle for the betterment of conditions of the labourers over the years demanded much of his time and energy. It was in large part due to Swami Rudrananda that the labouring class finally gained considerable freedom and their economic condition gradually improved.

Referring to his service to the downtrodden in Fiji it was once remarked: 'One of the great paradoxes of the Fiji sugarcane industry is that the one man who remained on centre stage longer and did more to enhance the income and condition of Fiji's cane farmers, was neither a high-powered politician nor an intellectual idealist, but a steady-eyed, saffron-robed Hindu monk.'

The Swami was even accused of taking part in politics, and some demanded his recall to India because of his constant fight for the interests of the farmers. But the Swami made himself very clear regarding his role with the sugarcane industry in the following statement: 'There was no politics. I was asked to represent the growers. I have not taken part in the affairs of government. There is no question of politics.'

Swami Rudrananda passed away in Fiji in 1985, having sacrificed his whole life for the service of the helpless, poor, exploited, and uneducated people of Fiji. His five decades of dedicated work contributed greatly to the uplift of the poor farmers of this land. They were rescued from a life of despair and humiliation and given a new life of hope and dignity. The academic, cultural, and spiritual programmes of the centre under his unassuming but steady leadership benefitted the whole Indian community. It is quite understandable, therefore, that the Indian community of Fiji looks upon Swami Rudrananda as a great liberator.

Swami Rudrananda's successor, Swami Damodarananda, continued the running of the centre much the same way since the passing of his great predecessor in 1985. He initiated a character-building programme for children and a welfare project. In September 1999 the high school in Fiji, which had had a very humble beginning at the hands of Swami Rudrananda, celebrated its golden jubilee. This was an important function attended by high dignitaries like the Prime Minister of Fiji, the High Commissioner of India to Fiji, etc. Today the school has more than 1000 students and is considered one of the best schools in Fiji.[5] However, Swami Damodarananda was called back to

India and he was succeeded by Swami Bhaktirupananda in January 2000.[6] Swami Bhaktirupananda has been since then carrying on the Vedanta work there in the footsteps of his predecessors. In October 2000 its new hostel extension building at Nawaicoba Vocational Centre, which was built with the financial assistance from Government of Canada, was inaugurated, providing improved facilities for the students' stay.[7] A new workshop for the carpentry and joinery section of this Vocational Centre was added a little later.[8] Further, a 2-lakh-dollar project at this Vocational Centre was initiated in 2002 for construction of a new office complex, a new workshop, and additional classrooms, etc.[9] Later, a life-size bronze statue of Swamiji was installed there in 2004.[10] Thus, Swamiji's message and Vedanta have been steadily making their way in the country through all these events and activities.

Nippon Vedanta Kyokai (Vedanta Society of Japan)

Japan, the land of the rising sun, consists of four main islands stretching from north to south in the Pacific Ocean and is separated from the coasts of Russia, the Koreas, and China by the Japan Sea. The language there is Japanese and the major religions are Shintoism and Buddhism.

The centre in Japan, started in 1959 and affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission in 1984, is located in Zushi, about 50 kilometres southeast of Tokyo. Centre activities include the holding of regular spiritual services in the shrine, celebrations, discourses, and retreats in and outside the centre. There is also a library, and books are published in Japanese. The centre also publishes a Japanese bi-monthly magazine, *Fumestu no Kotoba* (The Universal Gospel).

Origin and Growth

Japan, with its beautiful landscape of seas, mountains, and forests rich in flora and fauna, is wonderfully picturesque. Although geographically located in Asia, it is situated far enough from the mainland to have escaped involvement in many of the continent's upheavals, yet it is close enough to have richly benefitted from continental Asian cultures.

Japanese culture has been largely influenced by China, and to a lesser degree by Korea as well. Religiously, Japan has been greatly influenced by

India through both China and Korea. In the modern era, Japan was nudged into the process of modernization by Europeans in the nineteenth century, and later by the United States in the twentieth century. But through this entire process, Japan has assimilated these influences to fit into its own traditions and suit its own needs. Despite the onslaught of Westernization, many cultural traits and traditions remain wholly Japanese. Some of these older traditions hold great sway over the psyche of the people, and Japan can, at times, appear to be an insular nation to outsiders. At this point, a very brief view of Japan's religious traditions will give readers a better understanding of the spiritual environment into which the Ramakrishna Movement was inaugurated in modern Japan.

Shintoism, the native religion of Japan, preaches the worship of nature, of ancestors, and of the emperor, who is believed to be of divine origin. All these, but especially the worship of the emperor, have contributed to the proverbial patriotism of the Japanese. Confucianism, which spread to Japan from China, taught such moral values as respect for elders, self-discipline, and performance of one's duty with utmost devotion. Buddhism, which entered Japan in the sixth century AD from India through China and Korea, enriched the religious ideas and practices of Japan and contributed to various aspects of the nation's culture.

At the outset, Japan, like many countries where Buddhism had taken hold, witnessed a great many monks willing to renounce hearth and home and devote themselves entirely to spiritual practice. Over the centuries, long-established centres of ecclesiastical training focused on philosophical wisdom, strict moral discipline, and mystic ceremonies, but their systems of hierarchy and collusion with seats of power had a corrupting effect. Occasionally, dissatisfied monks would leave to preach new tenets, some of which developed into new branches of Buddhism, such as occurred around the year 1200.

The end of the twelfth century witnessed great upheavals with the establishment of a new military government at Kamakura. This was not a mere political change, but a revolt by the warrior and peasant classes against the over-refinement of the aristocracy. It was a time of social, moral, and religious unheaval as well, and a new 'easy method' of salvation called Amita or Jodo Buddhism was proposed by a monk named Hohnen. This tenet taught that simple faith in Buddha's grace was all that one needed to cross this

ocean to the 'Jodo' or 'Pure Land', and it required only chanting the Lord's name.

Later, theoretical arguments over whether one's own spiritual effort was in itself a denial of Buddha's grace gave way to even 'easier' methods such as taught by Shinran and Nichiren. Shinran declared simply, 'Neither virtue nor wisdom, but faith.' He discarded his monastic robes, married, and taught that faith itself was Buddha's free gift to all. Many converted to these 'easy' paths, and as ever, fewer seekers sought salvation through monastic life.

Throughout these periods of political and social change, however, Buddhism persisted and received state patronage during most of the Middle Ages. Then, in 1868, it was permanently and violently replaced by Shintoism as the state religion with the onset of the Meiji Restoration era. After centuries of being in favour, Buddhism suddenly lost its position and Buddhists were subjected to severe torture and humiliation by the government and its most zealous supporters. Most of the Buddhist monks, who had lived lives of celibacy according to monastic traditions, were forced to marry in order to bring them in line with the practices of Shinto priests. The properties of Buddhist temples and monasteries were confiscated, temples were demolished, and their scriptures burnt.

All these factors contributed to the degradation of Buddhism in Japan, and the Japanese were thus deprived of the guidance and inspiration of a religion based on renunciation, service to mankind, and universal love in the name of God. Without such ideals to follow and inspire, no nation, no matter how materially enriched it may become, can have a firm mooring and is bound to drift with a feeling of void at heart. Although early followers of Christianity suffered from severe persecution from the 16th to early 19th centuries, the religion began spreading throughout Japan in the middle of the 19th century. Today Christianity has a considerable number of followers, and its missionaries played an important role in imparting modern educational practices, especially in providing education to Japanese women.

This is roughly the religious backdrop of Japan towards the end of the 19th century, when Swami Vivekananda made a brief stop-over and visited some of its important cities on his way to the Parliament of Religions in the USA in 1893. Although he probably did not give a formal lecture on Vedanta at that time, he did make an impression on those Japanese who had the rare

privilege of meeting him. Observing the resemblance of his face to that of the Buddha, many referred to him as the 'second Buddha'. Swamiji, in turn, was also impressed by such positive qualities of the Japanese character as patriotism, hard work, the power of assimilation, cleanliness, and aesthetic sense, to name but a few.

Swamiji later referred to these good qualities of the Japanese to his Indian audiences on a number of occasions. He observed that Indians, especially the nation's youth, would be benefitted by studying secular matters in Japan, just as the Japanese would benefit from the study of Indian spirituality. It was only after Swamiji had become a world figure in the field of religion by preaching Vedanta in the West that attempts were made by some prominent Japanese, including the Japanese Consul to Calcutta and Okakura Tenshin, a renowned art critic, to bring Swamiji to Japan to preach his message. One of Swamiji's close American friends and devotees, Miss Josephine MacLeod, had lived in Japan for some time and worked behind the scenes to try and bring this about.

Due to Swamiji's failing health, however, a second visit was never realized, and considering some of the social and political circumstances that prevailed in Japan at that time, the question arises as to whether the country was ready to receive the message of Vedanta from Swami Vivekananda then. In raising this question, it should be noted that with the onset of the Meiji era, the country reversed its policy of isolation and made an all-out effort to transform itself into a modern country following the Western mode.

In this process of modernization, Japan replaced many of its age-old systems and values with those from the West. But the country was not satisfied with these changes alone, and began to cherish lofty political and economic ambitions. Japan soon aspired to become a competitor of Western colonization by pursuing foreign policies similar to those of the 'Monroe Doctrine' adopted by the USA. Such a strategy would serve to both oust Western imperialists from the Far East and Southeast Asia, while enhancing Japan's own power and influence in the region. As we know from history, these policies led to Japan's unfortunate involvement in the Second World War and, finally, a humiliating defeat. This led the country into a period of deep national frustration. Hence, one may reasonably ask whether Japan was really of the right mindset to hear the message of Vedanta during the first half of the last century. Nevertheless, after a tragic but temporary set-back, Japan is once again on the

global stage as one of the world's economic superpowers, due to hard work, strong determination, and the unity of purpose and sacrifice for the country, all of which exemplify the positive aspects of the Japanese character.

Compared with the Korean and Chinese foreign communities, the Indian community in Japan is rather small. Indians began visiting and settling in Japan in the late nineteenth century for job-skill training, business opportunities, and jobs. Among the distinguished Indians who visited Japan in the first half of last century were Swami Trigunatitananda and Swami Abhedananda, two direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the great poet Rabindranath Tagore, and two of India's great freedom fighters, Rasbehari Bose and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

In 1931, Romain Rolland's biography of Vivekananda was translated into Japanese and was possibly the first publication of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature available to Japanese readers. An academy for the study of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Vedanta that was started in 1957 by Mr. Narayan Uchigaki, a Japanese, in collaboration with some other Japanese and Indians near Osaka, became a society in around 1960. This society also published some books on Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. And although the society used to keep in close contact with the Ramakrishna Order, in the course of time it began preaching its own cult beliefs and is now limited to a small number of followers in Japan and the USA.

When the thirteenth President of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Ranganathananda, visited Japan in 1958 on a lecture tour sponsored by the Indian government, he inspired an interested group, including Professor Nikki Kimura, and Mr. V. S. Rao, to form a society to study and preach the ideas of Vedanta and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Accordingly, the Vedanta Society was formed in November 1958. Prof. Kimura, Professor Emeritus of Risshyo University, had lectured at Calcutta University for some time, as he had lived in India for 22 years and was proficient in Bengali. An admirer of the Ramakrishna Mission, Prof. Kimura became the newly-formed Society's first President, while Mr. Rao, a retired Indian officer of the British Indian Army, who had settled in Japan in 1953 and was an ardent follower of Vivekananda, became its first Secretary.

On 2 May 1959 the Society was formally inaugurated by Swami Nikhilananda, head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre of New York, on his

way back to New York from India, at a public meeting attended by Sir C. P. N. Singh, the Indian Ambassador to Japan, and some Japanese scholars. Swami Ranganathananda was not only the inspiration behind the Ramakrishna Movement in Tokyo, he also impressed the Indian government enough to release an annual grant to the Society for its activities. This grant, which was a substantial amount in those days, brought great financial relief to the fledgling Society.

The Society then began translating Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature from English into Japanese, publishing a magazine, and organizing talks by the visiting monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Members would also meet regularly and undertake some spiritual programmes. Mr. Lokumal K. Chellaram, a Hong Kong based Indian businessman and Chairman of the Chellaram group of companies, made a lump sum donation of £5,000. This and other donations from the Japanese and the local Indian community were utilized to purchase a small plot of land and erect a little house in Zushi, a small coastal resort town some 50 kilometers southeast of Tokyo in 1970.

With the construction of 'Holy Mother's House', Mrs. Haru Nakai, a devotee of great resolution who had joined the Society in 1960, began living there. She dedicated her life to the cause of the Society, having engaged herself in interpreting talks, translating articles and books from English to Japanese, editing the centre's magazine, and rendering various other services to the Kyokai for more than three decades. To her credit she translated or edited most of the books published by the Kyokai until her passing away in December 1999.

Holy Mother's House also accommodated the devotees and monks of the Ramakrishna Order visiting Japan. Swami Bhaskarananda of the Vedanta Society of Seattle, USA, visited the Japan Society quite often in the 1970s, and it was on these occasions that members got an opportunity to mix closely with a monk of the Ramakrishna Order and learn more about the Order's ideals, objectives, and traditions.

A second, larger building, that was to become the centre's ashrama and main campus in later years, was built in 1978. This site is a ten-minute walk from Holy Mother's House, and the purchase of this land and construction were made possible by donations from Mrs. Nakai and Mr. H. R. Gajaria, an Indian businessman, as well as contributions received from Japanese and Indian devotees and well-wishers. During the first visit of Swami Bhuteshananda,

then Vice-President of the Order, the new ashrama was consecrated on 7 May 1978 in the presence of a large gathering.

Swami Bhuteshananda visited the Japan centre many times after that, but on his last visit in 1990 he came in the capacity of President of the Ramakrishna Order. His spirituality, erudition, keen sense of humour, and, above all, his extremely loving nature, had a tremendous impact on all who met him, and he drew members from far and near all across Japan. His discourses, private spiritual instructions, and especially his holy and loving company, were quite moving and fascinating, and a good number of the Society's members took initiation from him.

Thus, the visits of Swami Bhuteshananda helped the Japanese devotees to identify themselves not only with the local centre, but with the Ramakrishna Order. Many of them started visiting Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres in Calcutta and the Headquarters at Belur Math, becoming more familiar with the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. All these activities helped pave the way for the affiliation of the Vedanta Society of Japan to the Ramakrishna Mission in 1984. Mr. V. S. Rao, the founder-secretary of the Japan Society, played a key role in the direction and running of the Society through all its ups and downs for more than two decades, from its inception to its eventual affiliation with the Mission.

Swami Siddharthananda was the first monk assigned as the President of the Vedanta Society of Japan by the Order in June 1984. In the capacity of secretary to Swami Bhuteshananda, Swami Siddharthananda had visited the centre twice before and had met the members. As such, a rapport already existed between him and the Japanese devotees, making his transition somewhat smoother and his stay in Japan that much easier. Thus, the long-cherished desire of Swami Vivekananda to do something for Japan, expresssed on the very day that he passed away, was finally fulfilled more than eighty years later.

With the full-time presence of a resident monk, the Society's membership soon saw a sea of difference between the management of the Society before and after the posting. Leadership naturally fell to the resident monk, whose first duty was to streamline activities according to the traditions and ideals of the Ramakrishna Order. This was no easy task.

The Swami rose to the occasion and introduced the routine lifestyle of an ashrama, including spiritual programmes of meditation, evening services, etc.

Regular birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, Buddha, and Jesus Christ were introduced. Discourses, retreats, and private interviews began. The publication of new titles was undertaken and sales system was greatly improved. Through these activities the centre witnessed a steady flow of visitors. Some even lived there to derive the benefit of the ashrama-atmosphere and to help the Swami run the centre. Most visitors were, of course, Japanese, but the Swami kept in close contact with the Indian community as well. Many of these contacts proved to be of great help to the society.

Being fully convinced that at least a moderate knowledge of the Japanese language was essential in preaching and running the centre, the Swami paid great attention to learning Japanese and, in course of time, acquired some mastery of the language. Unfortunately, his Japanese skills would never be fully utilized for the cause of Vedanta, as his health began to fail, and after nearly a decade of pioneering work, he left the country in December 1993.

The author of this article, the current head, took charge of the centre that same December and carried on the activities of his predecessor. In the midst of carrying on these duties, however, the Swami continually pondered ways to spread the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda to an even wider Japanese audience. It was then that a unique opportunity arose. It turned out that the very year of his posting coincided with the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's visit to Japan. The Swami seized on this auspicious opportunity to celebrate the centennial of Vivekananda's visit to Japan to present Swamiji's message on a larger scale.

An organizing committee consisting of Japanese and Indian devotees and well-wishers was formed, with the Indian Ambassador chosen as chief patron. This committee set about making preparations for a large public celebration to be held in a rented hall in Tokyo. Encouraged by the success of this event, it was decided that a public celebration of Swamiji's birth be held each year, and the event has been quite well received each year since then.

A growing number of local residents are becoming aware of these celebrations through the media, as some newspapers have shown special interest in the programme. Talks on Swamiji's ideas on various aspects of life are given by prominent Japanese scholars and visiting monks of the Order. Seminars on the harmony of religions and attractive cultural programmes that include musical performances have been drawing large numbers of Japanese. A special

issue of the Vedanta Society of Japan's magazine is published containing the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and the sale of Vedanta and Mission literature at these celebrations is also effective in reaching out to people.

The number of talks given both in and outside the centre have steadily increased. Regular discourses in Japanese in different cities on all of the main islands of Japan have begun. At this writing, however, the number of members of the Vedanta Society of Japan and subscribers to its bimonthly magazine is still relatively small, but the number of Japanese who have become acquainted with the names of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and have studied some of their works is growing.

The centre has so far published as many as 26 titles in Japanese, including the complete translation of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Vol. 1), *The Four Yogas of Swami Vivekananda*, *The Eternal Companion*, Life of Swami Turiyananda and Swami Adbhutananda, *Hinduism*, *Illustrated Biography of Swami Vivekananda for the Children*, etc. It, as well as the centre in Argentina, has the largest number of publications in non-English foreign languages produced by the Mission's centres abroad.

In 1995, a one-hour interview on 'Sri Ramakrishna and the harmony of religions' with Professor Tsuyoshi Nara, former professor of Tokyo Foreign Language University, was broadcast on the nation's public broadcast network, NHK. This same programme was re-broadcast twice on later dates, which also greatly helped to make the Japanese aware of the message of Vedanta as propounded by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Visits to India by Japanese who have come into contact with the Mission are increasing as well. All of these efforts are contributing to making the names and ideas of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda more familiar in Japan.

The 'Holy Mother's House', about which we have already mentioned, was recently rebuilt to accommodate guests and to provide space for storage of books and parking of cars. This new building was dedicated in January 2005 in the presence of many devotees and members who had come from different cities of Japan. The event was held in connection with the 150th birth-anniversary year of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. The Society also released two of its new publications, the Japanese translation of *The Life of the Holy Mother* by Swami Nikhilananda, and *The Gospel of Holy Mother* on this occasion.

In last three years the Japan Centre has produced CDs on the Vedic Mantras, Srimad Bhagavad Gita, and guided meditation (in Japanese and English), some of which are in constant demand. The Centre has also launched a Web site and has been publishing a bilingual (Japanese and English) news bulletin, delivered via Internet, since April 2003. These activities are positively helping to familiarize the movement further in a highly advanced country like Japan where use of modern gadgets is quite common.

Another phenomenal development observed in this country at the start of this century also has relevance for this movement. Hundreds of 'Yoga' (Hathayoga) centres have sprung-up like mushrooms across Japan that, like those in some other foreign countries, are primarily interested in physical health only. Recently, some of these centres are showing genuine interest in meditation for mental peace and spiritual uplift. At the request of such groups, the Swami is currently holding spiritual discourse sessions for them, with guided meditation as an important element.

Considering that it would be most appropriate for the Japan Centre to take the initiative in spreading the Vedanta Movement to its neighbouring countries, the Swami of the Japan Centre has begun visiting South Korea and the Philippines in recent years, being invited by interested individuals to give discourses to groups that they have organised. As a consequence, while preparations are afoot to start a private Vedanta Society in the Philippines very soon, there is also a bright chance of launching a Vedanta Society in South Korea in the near future.

Impact of the Movement

In light of the accounts of the Ramakrishna Movement in Singapore, Mauritius, and Fiji, one may reasonably conclude that the impact of the Movement has been somewhat limited to the Indian populations in these areas. Again, the degree of impact from one country to the other varies as well. Mauritius, for example, is a country free form ethnic troubles. Hindus there are in the majority and enjoy a firm hold on the government. As such, the Movement there has spread rather freely, but further consolidation and an organ for reaching non-Indians is also needed.

On the other hand, despite its large Hindu population, Fiji suffers terribly from ethnic strife. The sharp polarization between Indian Hindus and native

Fijian Christians has served to reduce the Ramakrishna Movement to one that only serves the Indian population. Thus, in spite of the liberal and universal ideas expounded by the Movement, acceptance of the message by native Fijians is rather doubtful.

In Singapore, Indians are in the minority, and there too the Movement has been largely limited to the Indian population. Neither the Chinese, who are the overwhelming majority and mostly Buddhists, nor the Malays, who rank second in population and are mostly orthodox Muslims, are inclined to come within the fold of the Movement. Again, with the westernization of Singapore and the government controls and regulations — one of which does not allow missionaries to remain in the country for extended periods — the emergence of many religious groups of Indian origin other than the Ramakrishna Mission has been seen.

These constraints have, in effect, stifled the growth of the Movement there. In this regard, it may be worthwhile to initiate the spread of the Movement into the neighbouring countries under the guidance of the Singapore centre. There are people in these countries who identify with Indian culture and may be in a better position to appreciate the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and be thus benefitted. What little effort the Singapore Mission has already initiated towards this objective shows much promise, but it can only flourish provided greater attention and energy are committed towards its fulfillment.

In Japan, growth of the Vedanta Movement is slow but steady. Generally speaking, the Japanese people are not particularly interested in religion even though many of them visit temples once in a while and perform religious rites on traditional occasions. The Japanese are liberal in the sense that they perform rites and visit places of worship of both Shinto and Buddhist religions. For example, marriages are held according to Shinto rites, while funerals are conducted according to Buddhist rites. These activities, however, are more about following Japanese traditions than a right spiritual understanding.

The Japanese have experienced both the bitter and sweet fruits of a modern, materialistic civilization over the past 100 years. And having realized the positive and negative sides of modernization, an increasing number of Japanese, including the youth, are now searching for something to fill the

spiritual void. Some intellectuals and leaders of society in Japan who have been indifferent to religion are slowly realizing the positive role religion plays in society. They are becoming cognizant of the fact that unless people are educated as to what does and doesn't constitute genuine religious ideas, the possibility of fake religious leaders misleading, cheating, and causing great harm to the innocent will always remain. Vedanta, as preached by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, is gradually being recognized as a modern, scientific, and universal religion, as perfectly suited to the needs of the Japanese people as it is to any nation of the modern world.

Japan's spiritual seekers who have had an opportunity to go through some Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature such as *Ramakrishna no Fukuin* (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) or Swamiji's *Karma-Yoga*, have confessed quite frankly that these are the very works they have long been desperately searching for. They said that they not only received new insights, but the reading of such books provided them with a better understanding and appreciation of their own religious faiths.

All these factors are paving the way for a glorious future for Vedanta in Japan. Vedanta, as a path of God-realization through the transformation of one's character and mental and spiritual orientation, cannot, of course, be accomplished overnight. In much the same way, Vedanta cannot be expected to sweep across Japanese society overnight either. Observation of the Japanese character has shown, however, that it is equally true that once the Japanese understand how Vedanta can bring real good and happiness into their lives at both the micro and macro levels, more and more will come to embrace it.

Vedanta can be expected to grow steadily in Japan, but it will not do so at the expense of the country's other religions. Those who were otherwise atheists or agnostics will come, in ever greater numbers, to accept Vedanta as a source of their mental, moral, and spiritual well-being. Again, those who hold religious beliefs but still feel a void in their hearts will come to accept Vedanta as a philosophy that will bring them the peace and joy of an inner life by helping them to better understand and practise their own religion. Such has been the case with the people of various nations of the world, and it is hoped the same will happen in Japan as well.

We have made some specific comments regarding the Vedanta Movement in Singapore, Mauritius, Fiji, and Japan. It would not be out of place to offer

some general observations on current prospects for the movement throughout the Asian continent as a whole. Obviously, except for India, concentrated efforts have been made in spreading the movement to Europe and America to date. The time has now come to take special initiative in carrying the message of Vedanta, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda to various parts of Asia, especially to countries like Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia and Taiwan, most of which have had a historical relationship with the cultural and religious traditions of India. Incidentally, there are other Indian religious groups already active in some of these countries.

The spread of the Vedanta Movement and message throughout these countries will be highly beneficial to these peoples, while serving to consolidate and strengthen the movement in Asia, and, thus, promote its global character.

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Ramakrishna Movement in Australia and New Zealand

SWAMI SRIDHARANANDA

The Laying of the Foundation

THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER'S centers in the West are known as Vedanta Centres. Swami Vivekananda was the greatest of those early teachers who brought the knowledge of Vedanta to the West when he heralded the greatness of Vedanta at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. It had a great impact on the Western audience, which reverberated all over the world. It kindled a keen interest and enthusiasm everywhere to learn more about Vedanta.

When Swami Vivekananda returned to India in 1897, he sent one of his brother-monks, Swami Shivananda, to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to preach Vedanta. His lectures on the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Vedantic principles were very popular which drew many people to it, including many westerners. One such person was Mrs. Elsie Picket, an Australian from Adelaide, touring Ceylon at that time. She was deeply impressed by the lectures of the Swami and was specially trained by him to teach Vedanta to the westerners. Swami Shivananda gave her the name 'Sister Haripriya'. She later travelled to Australia and New Zealand at the direction of the Swami and was successful in creating an interest in Vedanta among the people of these two countries.

In 1908, a Swedish lady, who was educated in the USA and had taken the name 'Sister Avabhamiya', was instructed and guided by Swami Abhedananda,

another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, to teach Vedanta in Australia. She contributed a lot in arousing interest in Vedanta among Australians and New Zealanders. She held classes to teach Vedanta and also lectured to propagate the philosophy. A Vedanta magazine, *Star of the East*, was started and published by her, which had a great influence in promoting the study and understanding of Vedanta. Unfortunately, she left Australia for a tour of India and other Eastern countries and, as a result, the classes and the publication of the magazine gradually ceased.

One of the most significant services rendered to the spread of Vedanta in Australia early in the last century came about in the 1920s. The life of an Australian, James Wale, is of great interest, which demonstrates the Divine play in human destiny. He was a bricklayer who served in World War I in Egypt and the Middle East. After the war, he led a carefree life and was drinking heavily. He once had the vision of the face of an Indian and at the same time heard inwardly the name 'Vivekananda'. It was a profound experience, and the effect was instantaneous. It shook him from his erstwhile lifestyle. He searched in libraries to identify from books and photographs the name 'Vivekananda' and the face he had seen. After a long search, he came across a book, *Rāja-Yoga*, by Swami Vivekananda. He was thrilled that at last he came across the name and the person he had seen in his vision. He corresponded with the publishers of the book and went to India in 1927. He joined the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math, near Calcutta, as a probationer. Swami Shivananda initiated him and named him 'Brahmachāri Vivekacaitanya'. He was deeply loved by all at the Mission for his purity, simplicity, devotion and dedication. But life in India was too rigorous for him and, after a few years, his health started to fail and was advised to return to Australia. On his return to Australia, he continued to live like a monk and gave talks on Vedanta and also held classes, helped the poor and the sick until he died in 1951.The earlier attempts to introduce Vedanta in Australia, though sporadic, were inspirational. These endeavours laid the foundation for the spread of the message of Vedanta and brought an awareness among the people there of a philosophy other than the main religious thought that had prevailed. These efforts were spread over a period of more than fifty years, by which time a place had been carved out for Vedanta in the mosaic of Australian spiritual structure.

The next important phase in the Vedanta Movement there began with the visits of Swami Ranganathananda. He laid a firm and solid foundation for the spread of the message of Vedanta in Australia. He was a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission who later became the 13th President of the organization. His first brief visit was in 1956 on the way to Fiji from Tokyo as a part of his international lecture tour. His next visit to Australia was in 1969 on the same programme. In 1971, he visited all capital cities in Australia, meeting a wide cross-section of people. His talks aroused keen interest among some sincere seekers of the universal philosophy. Thus, under his guidance, a group of devotees formed the first Vedanta Centre in Australia. It was named 'Vedanta Society of W.A'. Mr. Mahalingam Sinnathamby and his elder brother, Dr. Amrithalingam Sinnathamby, are the founding members of this society.

Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of NSW

A very dedicated person who contributed immensely to the development and spread of the Vedanta Movement in Australia was Mrs. Vilma Spencer, who passed away on 6 September 2005. She was attracted to the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. She visited India in 1950 and received initiation from Swami Yatiswarananda there. She made many more visits to India and was deeply influenced by India's rich spiritual culture in general and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in particular. She was also instrumental in inviting and hosting Swami Ranganathananda during his visits in 1969, 1971 and 1974 to 1986. Mrs. Spencer organized talks, lectures and retreats during the Swami's visits to Sydney till 1982. Encouraged by the Swami to spread the message of Vedanta, Mrs. Spencer started the 'Vedanta Book Agency' and made available the relevant literature of Ramakrishna Order's publications in Australia. Also, she formed a group of people interested in Vedanta philosophy. Under the guidance of Swami Ranganathananda during his visit in 1974, the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of NSW was formed in Sydney and subsequently registered.

The members of the Society desired to have a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission to reside permanently in Sydney and take charge of the Society. As it appeared that it might take a long time, Swami Ranganathananda suggested that the Ramakrishna Sarada Math and Mission in Calcutta be approached to

depute a nun to Sydney. As a result, the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of NSW was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Sarada Math and Mission of India in 1982. Pravrajika Ajayaprana Mataji was sent from India. She took charge of the Society, which was renamed as 'Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of NSW'. She continues to hold charge of the institution to date. In addition to a nunnery, this Centre conducts its cultural and spiritual activities at the Vedanta Hall situated at 15 Liverpool Road, Croydon, NSW.

But the desire of some devotees to have a branch of Ramakrishna Math and Mission to guide, inspire, and lead them, and to serve a wider circle of society, was still unfulfilled. It was felt that attempts should continue to urge the Trustees of Ramakrishna Mission to depute a monk to Sydney. To formalize these attempts, a separate body was needed, and thus the Vedanta Centre of Sydney was formed in 1984.

Mr. B. Ramakrishna and Mrs. Kanaka Ramakrishna, both initiated devotees of the Order, started the Vedanta Centre of Sydney in 1984 with its premises at 27 Rickard Road, Strathfield, which was subsequently registered under the Charitable Collections Act. The couple, by their commitment, dedication, selfless and sincere work, were holding fortnightly study-circle groups to study the scriptures, philosophies of other religions, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. They hosted all the visiting swamis of the Ramakrishna Order every year and organized public lectures, parlour meetings, and occasional retreats during such visits. Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature and books for children were also sold by them to spread the message of Vedanta. Also, their relentless efforts to get a branch of Ramakrishna Math and Mission by affiliating the Vedanta Centre of Sydney were continued. After a visit to Australia in 1999, Swami Smarananda, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, recommended to the Trustees that Vedanta Centre of Sydney be recognized as an affiliated branch of the Mission by posting a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission to Sydney.

The headquarters then deputed the author to take charge of the work in Australia. He had visited Australia in 1993 and in 1997. He reached Australia on 10 October 2000 and assumed the responsibility of the President of Vedanta Centre of Sydney on 22 October 2000 at a formal function held at 27 Rickard Road, Strathfield, from which day Vedanta Centre of Sydney became an affiliated branch of the Ramakrishna Math. This was a historic event of great

significance, as a Centre, the first affiliated branch of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, had been founded in Australia. To assist in the activities of the Centre, Swami Atmeshananda arrived in Sydney in March 2001. Swami Chandrashekharananda also later joined them.

As a result of the arrival of the swamis, the activities and the consequent needs of the Centre increased. After its affiliation, the Vedanta Centre of Sydney first moved into a rented premise at 21 Myrna Road, Strathfield, for a few months, and then moved to a bigger premise at 62 Redmyre Road, Strathfield. Now the Centre has moved to its own premise at 85 Bland Street, Ashfield, from 26 December 2002, which is spacious enough to accommodate a shrine, a monastery, a library, bookshop, guest quarters and other activities. It is centrally located very near to the City Centre and easily accessible by public transport. Classes on the *Bhagavad Gita* are held at the South Strathfield Bowling Club located in Augusta Street, Strathfield, on Sunday mornings. Scriptural classes on the Upaniṣads and the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patanjali are held on Wednesday evenings, and on Saturday afternoons moral and religious classes for children are held by the Centre. The birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, as also the birthdays of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Durga Ashtami Puja, and Christmas Eve are celebrated by the Centre. The yoga classes taught by professional teachers attract a sizeable number of people to the Centre. As a youth outreach programme, tutorial classes on Mathematics for students 10, 11 and 12 years old are undertaken with the help of Mr. Jeff Geha and his colleagues.

Thus, the present activities of the Centre include preaching, counselling and spiritual guidance; study of scriptures, especially the Upaniṣads and Vedanta philosophy; conducting of youth forums in the form of debates, discussions and study circles; holding moral and religious classes for children and youth, introducing them to the hoary traditions of Indian culture; and conducting yoga classes, etc. Among the future programmes planned are tutorial classes for students, a library, and Vedic chanting classes.

Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Queensland (Brisbane)

Vedanta was introduced to Queensland formally in 1986. Prior to that, Swami Ranganathananda had visited Queensland and given talks at the

Universities there. Swami Damodarananda from Fiji began visiting Brisbane regularly and held classes at the home of Mr. Mahalingam Sinnathamby, who had moved in from Perth. Mr. R. B. Patel and Dr. Raj took keen interest in the visits of Swami Ranganathananda and organized his talks at the Universities. Initially, monthly meetings were held at SWARA and at the Theosophical Society. This was attended by not only some of the members of the Theosophical Society, but also by the wider community. A formal committee was established and monthly prayer meetings were held regularly at the homes of members. In 1990, a statue of Sri Ramakrishna was installed in the Ganesha Temple in North MacLean. The statue was donated by the Vedanta Centre of Queensland to promote Sri Ramakrishna and his message. In the year 2000, Swami Damodarananda resided in Brisbane for about six months in a rented house and thus inspired the devotees to form a society. The group officially registered themselves as a society in 2002 with the name 'Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Queensland'. It officially inaugurated its centre in April 2004. Now this centre also is a sub-centre of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. It is housed in

a rented building at 61, Northbrook Street, Sinnamon Park (Brisbane), Queensland. A resident devotee conducts the daily programmes like puja, devotional singing, reading from the Gospel on Sundays, and also moral and religious classes at two schools.

Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Victoria (Melbourne)

The centre at Melbourne was functioning independently since 1991. Due to the visits of the swamis, and with the efforts of Mr. Tapesh Gangopadhyaya and his wife, Mrs. Malaya Gangopadhyaya, the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Victoria was registered in September 1995. After the starting of the official centre of the Order at Sydney, it has been under the guidance of the Sydney Centre. In December 2003, the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Victoria purchased a large house at 7, Judy Court, Vermont South (Melbourne), Victoria. Since then it has been functioning there. The house has a book sales section, a shrine and living quarters for monastic members. It is now a sub-centre of the Vedanta Centre of Sydney. In March 2004 this sub-centre was formally inaugurated.

Groups at Canberra, Perth, and Adelaide

A group of devotees had been active in Canberra. In November 2004 this centre was made the sub-centre of the Vedanta Society of Sydney. The author, since his arrival in Australia in October 2000, has been visiting Perth twice a year to conduct talks. The local group of devotees there meet regularly every month for conducting *satsangs* at the homes of devotees. At Adelaide, through the efforts of Dr. S. J. Iswaran and Mrs. Padma Iswaran, a core group of devotees interested in Vedanta has been regularly conducting classes and prayer meetings. The author has been visiting Adelaide once every month to conduct classes. The local devotees have organized two programmes till now to raise funds for the Sydney Centre. Thus, the devotees in Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra, Perth, and Adelaide are earnestly interested to have independent centres with permanent resident swamis to steer the Vedanta work.

Vedanta in New Zealand

In addition to Sister Haripriya and Sister Avabhamiya, another person who contributed to the spreading of the message of Vedanta in New Zealand was Miss. Blanche Edith Baughan. She was born in Putney, London, in 1870, and graduated from the London University in 1892. Destiny brought her to settle in New Zealand in 1900, and in 1902 she chose to live on Banks Peninsula, and for some years she was fully occupied with her literary pursuits. A Mrs. Bristow, wife of the editor of the Christchurch Press, interested Miss. Baughan in Vedanta. Between 1910-14 she went to San Francisco for about a year and there she came in touch with and absorbed the Vedanta philosophy at the San Francisco Vedanta Centre where Swami Prakashananda was the Minister-in-charge. She returned to New Zealand in 1914 and formed study classes in Vedanta, both in Sumner and Christchurch. In the latter, meetings were held fortnightly at a home in Augusta Street, Redcliffs, with about ten members in attendance. These continued for three or four years. She used excerpts from the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* as the subject matter for discussions. In 1927 or thereabouts, such classes were held in the home of Quaker friends in May's Road, Christchurch. From this study, several members were greatly benefited. Miss. Baughan wanted to apply the principles of Vedanta in practical life. Hence, she, with her friends, engaged in social reform and helped women in particular to overcome prejudices and gave them protection. Until she was seventy years of age, she continued her unremitting activities, visiting the prisons and trying her very best to help the less fortunate. She lived alone. In 1930, Miss. Baughan moved across to Akaroa, a lovely spot on Banks Peninsula, built a small cottage and named it 'Ashrama'. There she lived for about 28 years until at the age of 88 (in 1958) she passed away peacefully. She left behind a few friends who studied and practiced Vedanta in their lives, thus contributing to the growth of Vedanta in New Zealand.

Swami Rudrananda and Swami Damodarananda from the Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji, visited Australia and New Zealand occasionally and kept the spirit of Vedanta alive in the hearts of devotees. Swami Damodarananda inspired people in New Zealand and thus devotees formed themselves into small groups in Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington, Dunedin and other places. He invited swamis from India to visit Fiji and also took them to Australia and

New Zealand to deliver talks and conduct retreats. The author visits Auckland regularly and thus the work in New Zealand is being put on a firm footing.

Conclusion

Australia is a huge country with a sparse population of about 20 million people. One in five of the population is overseas born. In the past, most immigrants came from Europe, but now, under Australia's non-discriminatory immigration policy, they come from well over 100 countries. However, about 33 per cent of new immigrants come from Asia each year, and about 4 per cent of its population is Asian. The number of Asian born Australians has also increased dramatically since the government repealed its whites-only immigration policy in 1966. In this multi-racial and cultural background, Ramakrishna-Vedanta Movement has a promising role to play in this 21st century and the centuries to come.

A New Monastic Tradition for Women
SARADA MATH & RAMAKRISHNA SARADA MISSION

PRAVRAJIKA ATMAPRANA

In order to understand the origin and history of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, it is essential to remember the founding and development of the Ramakrishna Order, because the above mentioned organizations are the counterparts of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. The person who played the pivotal role in establishing this Order for both men and women was Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda's Vision

One day Narendra (as Swami Vivekananda was known in his premonastic life) told his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, that he wanted only to be deeply immersed in the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*. His guru responded that there was a state in spiritual life higher than Self-realization, or liberation. He expected his disciple to see God in the world too and work for the welfare of all humankind. Narendra's dictates of conscience, at that very moment, veered in that direction. His alert mind took to the study of the different aspects of Indian philosophic literature, and his emotional nature made his heart surpass all distinctions of religion and nationalities. Referring to his growth of mental powers, he spoke and wrote to his brother monks about the conditions of his mind and heart. In 1892, he told Swami Abhedananda: 'So much energy has accumulated in me that I am afraid I may burst.'[1] At the same time, seeing the suffering of millions

of human beings, he wrote to Swami Akhandananda: 'It is the heart, the heart that conquers, not the brain. Books and learning, Yoga and meditation and illumination — all are but dust compared with love.'[2] To Swami Turiyananda, he told: 'I do not quite understand what spirituality is, but my heart has expanded, and I have learnt to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed.'[3]

It is this combination of head and heart that made Swamiji a power that could lift the minds of the people merged in the mire of the world to a spiritual level, and at the same time bring solace and salvation to the poor and the lowly — men and women both. Even before the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, he wrote to his disciple Alasinga on the 20th of August expressing his desire that, 'A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the down-trodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up, the gospel of equality.'[4]

To fulfil all these aims, he wanted to build up an organization. This was neither a dream nor even a passing thought for Swamiji. He started writing to his brother monks in India:

> I am giving you a new idea. If you can work it out, then I shall know you are men and will be of service.... Make an organized plan.... Perfect sincerity, holiness, gigantic intellect, and an all-conquering will. Let only a handful of men work with these and the whole world will be revolutionized.... It is the patient upbuilding of character, the intense struggle to *realize* the truth, which alone will tell in the future of humanity.... Come! Apply yourselves heart and soul to it.... We want some disciples — fiery young men — do you see? Intelligent and brave, who dare to go to the jaws of Death, and are ready to swim the ocean across.... We want hundreds like that, both men and women. Try your utmost for that end alone.... Let character be formed, and then I shall be in your midst. Do you see? We want two thousand sannyāsins, nay ten, or even twenty thousand men and women, both. What are our matrons doing?[5]

In this vein Swamiji wrote to his own disciples and brother monks from 1894 to 1895, culminating in the foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission

Association in 1897. By the time the Ramakrishna Mission Association became known as the Ramakrishna Math, Swamiji had defined rules of conduct which were known as the 'Belur Math Rules'. In the very first rules it was clearly stated thus:

- This Math is established to work out one's own liberation, and to train oneself to do good to the world in every way, along the lines laid down by Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. For the women, too, there will be started a similar Math.
- The Women's Math will be conducted on exactly the same principles as that for the men. There will be this restriction that in the Women's Math, there shall be no connection with men, and in that of the men, no connection with women.
- Two such Maths will be started in some suitable places in the Himalayas and conducted on similar principles.
- The Women's Math will be managed by the men from a distance, so long as competent women are not available for the task. After that, they will themselves manage all their affairs.[6]

From these rules it is amply clear that Swamiji gave importance to establishing a women's Math. However, at that time in India, the social conditions did not allow a woman the freedom to cross the periphery of a householder's life. Knowing this, Swamiji laid the responsibility on the monks to see that something was done for the uplift of 'women and the masses', as he liked to put it. The senior monks of the Ramakrishna Math were conscious of this responsibility, and time and again, the matter was discussed by the Trustees. Swamiji keenly felt that there was no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women was improved. While in the United States during the terrible winter of 1894, he lectured from place to place, fighting against all odds to collect funds for Mother's Math. Swamiji's anguished heart cried out to his friends again in 1895: 'In this dire winter, I have travelled across mountains and over snows at dead of night and collected a little fund; and I shall have peace of mind when a plot is secured for Mother.'[7]

Swamiji's Vedantic mind knew that 'each soul is potentially divine', and therefore he could not accept or tolerate the distinction between men and

women. He wanted everyone to realize that in the Supreme Truth, in the Atman, there is no sex-distinction. 'Out with the differentiation between man and woman — all is Atman.... In every soul is infinite strength.'[8]

Swamiji knew that Sri Ramakrishna's women disciples like Gauri-Ma, Yogin-Ma, and Golap-Ma had the inner strength to spread the Vedantic ideas. At the same time, for the building of an independent organization of women who were desirous of renouncing worldly life for spiritual enlightenment, an ideal spiritual leader for the future women's Math was necessary. She would be a centre of divine power from which would radiate rays of spirituality, knowledge, devotion, renunciation, purity, toleration, contentment, compassion, and service — all in one. He was aware right from the beginning that Sri Sarada Devi, now known to the world over as Holy Mother, was that nucleus. Even Swamiji's brother monks could not at first gauge the Shakti of Holy Mother until Swamiji pointed it out to them. In one of his letters he wrote:

> You have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life — none of you.... Without Shakti, there is no regeneration for the world.... Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born in the world.... To me, Mother's grace is a hundred thousand times more valuable than Father's. First build a Math for Mother. First Mother and Mother's daughters, then Father and Father's sons.[9]

Only a bold Vedantin like Swamiji could envision such a Math for women. It was his desire to see the Vedantic truth — that in the supreme state of the Paramātman there is no distinction of sex — put into practice. According to him, Vedanta declares that One and the same consciousness is present in all beings, so it is difficult to understand why so much difference is made between man and woman. Citing scriptural authority in this way, Swamiji permanently removed the objections against women pursuing the monastic path leading to illumination and liberation.

The Origins

The genesis of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission can be traced to September 1895 when Swamiji left America for London. He was invited by Miss Henrietta Müller who, in 1893, spoke at the Parliament of

Religions in Chicago and met Swamiji there. A second invitation came from his English disciple, E. T. Sturdy. In London, Swamiji gave lectures and also held informal classes and talks in private homes. Among those who attended his talks was Lady Isabel Margesson, who invited Swamiji to her home on a Sunday afternoon in November. One of her friends was Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble, who was the principal of a school in Wimbledon. She was also a member of the Sesame Club and was highly interested in educational work.

After hearing a few talks and lectures given by Swamiji, Margaret accepted him as her Master. She wrote in her widely known book, *The Master as I Saw Him*, 'I had recognised the heroic fibre of the man, and decided to make myself the servant of his love for his own people.'[10] From this conviction, Margaret immediately responded to Swamiji's invitation when, during a conversation, he turned to her and said, 'I have plans for the women of my own country in which you, I think, could be of great help to me.' For years Margaret had waited for a call that would change her life. Years later, she wrote to a close friend in America, Miss Josephine MacLeod: 'Suppose He had not come to London that time! Life would have been like a headless torso — for I always knew that I was waiting for something, I always said that a call would come. And it did.'[11]

When Margaret wrote to Swamiji and expressed her desire to join him in India, at first he discouraged her, thinking that the climate of India might not suit her, and she would have to face caste prejudices, difficult living conditions, and so on. Margaret, however, was determined to overcome all difficulties. Swamiji, therefore, wrote to her in 1897:

> I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman; a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women specially. India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination, and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted.[12]

Swamiji's letter exhilarated Margaret. In January 1898, she left for India. One of her friends described her thus at the time of her departure:

> Her portrait, at the period of her sailing, shows us a young but distinctive woman.... She derived from, and was proud of, Irish ancestry, and, generous,

> impulsive, ardent, she embodied much of the charm, the power of ready speech, the fascination of the Celt at his best. All this she carried from the Emerald Isle, by way of England, to India, the home of her adoption.[13]

Although India borrowed Margaret for this work, Swamiji knew through his study of the Vedic and Upaniṣadic texts that even during the Vedic days women had followed the path of renunciation and learning, keeping the highest ideal in life before them. For example, when the great sage Yājñavalkya wanted to retire to the forest and divide his wealth equally between his two wives, Kātyāyanī and Maitreyī, the latter asked him whether wealth could lead her to immortality. When Yājñavalkya replied in the negative, Maitreyī said, 'What then shall I do with wealth which will not make me immortal?' Swamiji was aware that this note of renunciation and learning was heard in India, sometimes loudly, sometimes faintly, but unmistakably. Therefore, if women today were given the freedom to choose the spiritual path, they would realize the Vedantic ideal that One Reality underlies the entire phenomena.

As previously mentioned, Swamiji ruled out all possible objections against women pursuing the spiritual ideal. Margaret Noble, later known as Sister Nivedita, was one of the best interpreters of Swamiji's ideas who also wrote how this might be accomplished:

> Women must rise in capacity, not fall. In all his plans for a widows' home or a girls' school and college, there were great green spaces. Physical exercise and gardening, and the care of animals, must form a part of the life lived there. Religion and an intensity of aspiration more frequent in the cloister than outside it, were to be the heart and background of this new departure. And such schools, when the winter was over, must transform themselves into pilgrimages, and study half the year in the Himalayas. Thus a race of women would be created, who should be nothing less than 'Bashi-Bazouks of religion'* and *they* should work out the problem for women. No

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* The Bashi-Bazouks were the body-guard of the Caliph. For many centuries, the members of the Turkish Guard consisted of soldiers who had been kidnapped in early childhood from all races and countries, and brought up in Islam. Their religion was thus their passion, and the service of their land and sovereign, their only bond of union. They were renowned throughout Europe for their fierceness and courage. Their power was broken in Egypt by Napolean.

> home, save in their work; no ties, save of religion; no love but that for guru, and people, and motherland.[14]

Margaret reached India on the 28th of January 1898. Within two months, on the 25th of March, Swamiji accepted her in the fold of the Ramakrishna Order when he initiated her into brahmacharya and gave her the name Nivedita, the dedicated one. Nivedita accepted the life of a brahmachārini, and later undertook the opening of an educational institution for making women fit pilgrims on the path of *abhyudaya*, worldly excellence, and *niḥśreyasa*, spiritual realization. Swamiji was transported with joy as his dream to give spiritual insight to women could now be fulfilled.

Nivedita started her school on the 13th of November 1898. Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, inaugurated the school at 16 Bosepara Lane, Calcutta, which served as Nivedita's residence also. On that occasion, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda (the first President of the Order), and Swami Saradananda (the first General Secretary of the Order), as well as two women devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, Yogin-Ma and Golap-Ma, were present. After she offered worship to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother said, 'I pray that the blessings of the Divine Mother of the Universe be upon this School and the girls it shall train to be ideal girls.' Nivedita thought deeply on these words and wrote later, 'I cannot imagine a grander omen than Her blessing, spoken over the educated Hindu womanhood of the future.'[15]

The school started functioning from Monday, the 14th of November. Initially the people in the locality were hostile and reluctant to send their daughters to the school, but as Swami Saradananda wrote in the school's report of 1905-12, '...the pure and simple life of its mistress soon endeared her to the ladies around, who gradually began to look at her as one of their own.' The school followed the kindergarten system. Along with it the children were taught Bengali, English, arithmetic, and basic science. In addition, lessons were given in reading, writing, painting, claywork, and sewing. Besides her work at the school, Nivedita was involved in many other activities including classes for brahmachārins at Belur Math twice a week, public lectures, weekly teacher training classes for her Brahmo friends, writing books and articles, and fighting against the plague epidemic of 1899.

Owing to lack of financial resources, Nivedita had to close down her school temporarily. She left for the West in June 1899 to collect funds for the school. In 1900, she presented her 'Project of Ramakrishna School for Girls' to her American audience. This resulted in the formation of the 'Ramakrishna Guild of Help' by American women to financially support Nivedita's school.

Nivedita returned to India in 1902 and reopened the school in February on the auspicious day of Saraswati Puja. As soon as she settled down at 17 Bosepara Lane, she wrote to Swamiji, who was then in Varanasi, about her work at the school. In a letter dated the 12th of February, he replied:

> May all powers come unto you! May Mother Herself be your hands and mind! It is immense power — irresistible — that I pray for you, and if possible, along with it, infinite peace.... If there was any truth in Sri Ramakrishna, may He take you into His leading, even as He did me, nay, a thousand times more![16]

In the natural process of development, the number of students steadily increased in the school. Swamiji never interfered with her plans and Nivedita confidently marched forward. She often remembered her guru's words uttered in the summer of 1898 in Kashmir, when they first discussed the school. When Nivedita had presented an overview of her ideas, Swamiji listened silently. Her initial thought was to begin the school in a small way. As she discussed these ideas with Swamiji, she realized that all educational efforts must be based on religious life and established on the universal teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. At the end of the discussion, when Nivedita requested that Swamiji critique her plans for education, he said:

> You ask me to criticize but that I cannot do. For I regard you as inspired, quite as much inspired as I am. You know that's the difference between other religions and us. Other people believe that their founder was inspired, and so do we. But so am I, also, and you as I, and after you, your girls and their disciples will be. So I shall help you to do what you think best.[17]

As Nivedita started her work at the school in earnest, another blow struck her like lightning. News reached her on the morning of the 5th of July that the previous night Swamiji had attained *mahāsamādhi*. Nivedita's deep sorrow did not allow her to rest. She only noted in her diary on the 4th of July 1902,

'Swami died'. He had said years before: 'It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body — to cast it off like a worn out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere until the world shall know that it is one with God!' She, therefore, wrote to Miss MacLeod in a prayerful mood:

> Pray that I may have strength and faithfulness and knowledge to do this and ask no other blessing for me. I want no other. He is NOT dead. He is with us always. I cannot even grieve. I only want to work.[18]

And she worked indeed! After her return from the West, Nivedita's ideas took a different turn. She honestly believed that what India needed first was political freedom. She therefore took an active interest in the current political activities of the first decade of the twentieth century and became acquainted with the political leaders of different parties. She was conscious that the political arena was not at all the focus of the Ramakrishna Order, which stood for spiritual and humanitarian ideas. Therefore she quietly told the President of the Order, Swami Brahmananda, that she would like to have complete personal freedom in her work. She resigned from the spiritual Order to which she belonged. Her love and devotion for Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji, however, remained unchanged.

We know that Swamiji had high hopes that, in time, Nivedita's efforts in the field of education would fulfil his dream of the spiritual awakening of women. In March 1899, Nivedita went to Belur Math to interview Swamiji for the *Prabuddha Bharata*. During their conversation, 'He pointed up the river in the direction of Dakshineswar and said he had begun to take steps towards a permanent home for the Mother and me — a home where I could have my students — and the practising School could be supplied from surrounding villages.'[19]

Because of Nivedita's change in direction, the cause of women suffered. Yet, Swamiji's dream continued to unfold under the care of Sister Christine Greenstidel, an American disciple of Swamiji. Nivedita still supported the school but became more occupied with travel throughout India to give lectures, which aroused the spirit of people to work for India's liberation. In 1904, both Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine decided to start a project for a women's section. For the first time, women were allowed to attend the school and learn sewing, needlework, Bengali, history, arithmetic, English, and Sanskrit,

whenever they were free from household duties. The Women's Section became known as the 'Pura-Stree-Vibhaga'. Sisters Christine and Nivedita worked together in harmony. When Nivedita passed away in 1911, responsibility for the school was assumed by Sister Christine.

Another significant contribution was made by Sudhira Bose, who joined the school as a teacher in 1906. She worked primarily with Sister Christine, and due to her love, energy, and resourcefulness, the school's enrollment and recognition in society increased greatly. In 1912, she left her home to live with Sister Christine and dedicated the rest of her life to the school. When Sister Christine left for America in 1914, owing to failing health, Sister Sudhira became the next administrator.

Sudhira expanded her responsibilities when she started an ashrama for dedicated women workers and a boarding house for students. It also accommodated poor women earning their livelihood through needlework and other crafts. The ashrama was called 'Matri Mandir' and was first housed at 68/2B Ramkanta Bose Street, and then at 53/1 & 2 Bosepara Lane. Holy Mother was very happy to learn about the ashrama for women, and said: 'At last my daughters will have a place to lay their heads.' In 1919, Holy Mother stayed for a month in the Matri Mandir and performed puja there. At that time, there were thirty-five boarders in the ashrama of whom twenty-four were students, six were dedicated women workers living as brahmachārinis, and five were poor women earning their living. After the *mahāsamādhi* of Sri Sarada Devi, the Matri Mandir was renamed 'Sarada Mandir'. This was the first time women spiritual aspirants lived and worked together, a prelude to Swamiji's dream for a Math for women.

Sister Sudhira is remembered for her courage and conviction to aid women who chose to break away from oppressive social restrictions. One such student of Nivedita's was a young girl named Parul (Sarala). With Sudhira's help, Sarala left home to lead a spiritual life under the direction of Holy Mother. Sarala served Holy Mother for three years until her passing away in July 1920. She also served Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma. In 1924 Swami Saradananda initiated her into sannyāsa according to Tantra (Pūrṇābhiṣeka) and gave her the name Sri Bharati.

Sudhira Devi was entrusted with the administration of the Home of Widows in Varanasi started by the Ramakrishna Mission in 1917. A branch of

the Nivedita school was also opened in Comilla in 1919. Although Sudhira was the administrator of the Nivedita school and ashrama, Belur Math managed the Permanent Fund for the maintenance of the school, in accordance with Nivedita's last will and testament. For this reason, the school reports from 1912 onwards were prepared and published by Swami Saradananda, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The legal affiliation of the school to the Ramakrishna Mission was finalized in 1918, and the school came to be known as the Ramakrishna Mission Sister Nivedita School. Until then, it was known simply as 'Nivedita School'. Foreign devotees referred to it as the 'Vivekananda School' and Nivedita herself had named it the 'Ramakrishna School for Girls'.

The school suffered a sudden and heart-wrenching loss when Sudhira Devi lost her life in a tragic accident on the 24th of November 1920. While travelling to Varanasi from Allahabad, she accidentally fell from the running train and never regained consciousness.

After Sister Sudhira's passing, the management of the school was transferred to some elderly women devotees including Meera Devi, Bani Devi, and others. Swami Saradananda provided able guidance and support. In order to construct a school building of its own, he purchased a plot of land with a loan on behalf of the Mission in November 1917. The lane on which this plot was located was later named Nivedita Lane and the foundation of the school building at 5 Nivedita Lane was laid by Swami Brahmananda himself. Those who witnessed the construction said that some bricks bearing the name of Sister Nivedita were specially made for that purpose. When the building was partially completed in 1922, the Nivedita School and the Sarada Mandir were transferred there.

After the second World War, the school suffered many financial difficulties. Sister Nivedita had written in her will that her school would not accept any help from the British government. The new Management Committee of the Ramakrishna Mission formed in 1946 decided to apply for financial aid from the government as India's independence in 1947 became an established fact. There were some differences of opinion between the women workers staying in the Nivedita School and the Mission authorities on the issue. So except for one person, Bijoli Sen, the entire group left the institution.

The Turning Point

Soon after, there came a turning point in the history of the school. Educated women inspired by Swami Vivekananda's teachings, and some of them even initiated by the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna — Swamis Shivananda, Subodhananda, and Vijnanananda — and other senior monks of the Order, joined the school. The first to join was Renuka Basu (Pravrajika Mokshaprana, the second President of Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission) in 1946. She was appointed both as the Head Mistress of the school and as Superintendent of Sarada Mandir. Gouri Dasgupta (Pravrajika Dayaprana, a Vice-President of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission) joined as a teacher. Bijoli Sen (Pravrajika Vidyaprana) was one of the dedicated women workers already staying in the Sarada Mandir. Lakshmi Sinha (Pravrajika Shraddhaprana, the present President of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission) joined in 1948 and took charge of the Sarada Mandir. Several other dedicated women workers joined during this period and later became sannyāsinis of Sri Sarada Math. After independence, the school obtained affiliation and recognition from the Calcutta University in 1949. A government grant was sanctioned from 1948-49.

In the fourth Monks' Conference of the Ramakrishna Math held in 1946, Swami Virajananda, in his Presidential Address, said:

> The problem of women-workers has not received our due attention so for long. They have not been given any appreciable scope for leading the monastic life in the Sangha as yet.... It is high time that the case of women-workers who earnestly desire to dedicate their lives to the Sangha should receive careful and sympathetic consideration. In this connection, it is well to remember that Swamiji wanted to establish a Math for women, and gave it precedence over even that for men.[20]

In the fifth Monks' Conference held in 1949 Swami Vireswarananda, then General Secretary, expressed the same views and stressed the idea of creating a nucleus under Belur Math and then making it independent.

Swami Vivekananda's prophecy regarding a monastic Order for women seemed to come true in the course of those years. It seemed as if Holy Mother was gently ushering in the spiritual regeneration of women in the country. The

efforts of dedicated women workers gathered momentum as another group of women in Calcutta living at the Sarada Ashrama joined the Ramakrishna Mission in 1950. Their leader was Asha Devi, who later (as Muktiprana) became the General Secretary of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission and worked for forty years directing the activities of all the Centres. She had a dynamic personality and made repeated requests to the authorities of Belur Math to give sannyāsa to women. In addition, Asha was the driving force behind the realization of Swamiji's dream for a women's Math under the aegis of the Ramakrishna Math, in which they would achieve the twin goals of 'spiritual realization and service unto others'. When the dedicated workers of the Nivedita School and the members of the Sarada Ashrama joined together, Swami Virajananda sent his blessing in the following words:

> It fills my heart with sublime joy to think of the momentous events, that by the infinite grace of Thakur, Ma and Swamiji, all of you who have found refuge at their holy feet have come together today with one purpose, one vow and one method of work. Indeed I could never imagine that this would happen in my lifetime; though, of course, I used to feel in my heart of hearts that Swamiji's earnest desire to kindle the spirit of renunciation and bring spiritual awakening in women would certainly be fulfilled one day. Swamiji wanted to break the barriers of sex in the realm of *sādhanā* and realisation.... In this union of the two groups I can well see the beginning of a far-reaching good. Many more women from different religions and countries will also come.[21]

Asha Devi was much encouraged by this address openly advocating the women's Math. She wrote an article entitled, *The Hindu Woman's Right to Sannyāsa*. It was published in the *Udbodhan* of 1946. The article, considered controversial by some, opened the door for in-depth discussions.

There was also a small group of women in Thrissur, who were working as teachers in the local Ramakrishna Ashrama and desired to join to form a monastic sisterhood under the Ramakrishna Math. Since many young women had come forward to join, the authorities of Belur Math started giving serious thought to Swamiji's idea of establishing a Math for women.

In the Monks' Conference of May 1952, a recommendation of far-reaching consequences was accepted, and that was related to the establishment of the

women's Math. In their meeting on the 29th of May 1952, the Trustees of Belur Math accepted the recommendation of the Monks' Conference:

> As this Conference is of the opinon that it is high time to go forward to realise Swamiji's idea that women should be put in a position to work out their destinies independent of men, it recommeds:
>
> 1. that women aspirants in the highest spiritual life, who have renounced their homes and joined our Math and Mission, work with the approval of the Headquarters and, who are designated as dedicated women workers, be helped through reasonable stages to form as early as possible an independent organisation of their own;
>
> 2. that as a first step in this process, a central body of such dedicated women workers be formed, and that the existing women's institutions and sections of our Math and Mission be placed one after another under its management;
>
> 3. that at the end of ten years or earlier, if this central body of dedicated women workers is found competent by the Math and Mission authorities as the case may be, it should be legally registered and the relevant Math or Mission institution for women be legally transferred to it;
>
> 4. that the interim arrangements should be inaugurated on the occasion of the Holy Mother's Birth Centenary by providing this central body of dedicated women workers with a suitable Home, so that when this body will be finally separated and registered, this Home may develop by the time of Swamiji's Birth Centenary into an independent Math for women as laid down by Swamiji in the Belur Math Rules.
>
> Since women aspirants have been initiated into formal brahmacharya by Swamiji, Swami Brahmananda and Swami Shivananda, this Conference recommends that this initiation be given, during the interim period but not afterwards, by the President of our Order to the dedicated women aspirants who are found fit by the President and Trustees for the time being.
>
> Having regard to the fact that Swamiji, in his writings and utterances, and specially in his Math Rules, has strongly advocated sannyāsa for women, this Conference recommends that, at the time of the complete separation of

this body of dedicated women workers as an independent organisation, if any of them already formally initiated into brahmacharya should make a request for sannyāsa and be found fit by the President and Trustees for the time being, the President will ordain them as sannyāsinis, but thereafter there will be no such ordination by our President.[22]

In the meantime, the Nivedita Girls' School celebrated its Golden Jubilee with a week-long programme from the 11th to the 17th of December 1952. [The School continued to maintain its standard of excellence throughout the years and, in 1998, held its Centenary Celebrations. On 6 November 1998, these events were highlighted in a function in which Dr. K. R. Narayanan, the President of India, was the chief guest. On the 13 November, a special worship ceremony was held in remembrance of the puja performed by Holy Mother herself on the 13 November 1898 when she inaugurated the School.]

Founding of Sri Sarada Math

On the 27th of December 1953, the Centenary Celebration of Holy Mother's birth was inaugurated at Belur Math. On that sacred day, some dedicated women workers of the Order were initiated into brahmacharya by Swami Shankarananda, the President, at Belur Math. Initiation into brahmacharya continued until 1958 at Belur Math.

A temporary home for the brahmachārinis came into being on the 10th of July 1954 in a house gifted to the Mission on C. I. T. Road, Entally, Calcutta. A suitable plot of land had been purchased earlier in 1951, which consisted of six acres with two buildings on the bank of the Ganga, a little north of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. This was secured by the Ramakrishna Math at the cost of about Rs. 4,35,000. After extensive alterations to the buildings, the brahmachārinis moved from the temporary location to this permanent home on the 2nd of December 1954.

The opening of Sri Sarada Math added a new and very significant chapter to the socio-religious history of India. On the 2nd of December 1954, Swami Shankarananda, the seventh President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, performed the opening ceremony of the Women's Math in the presence of a large number of senior monks and Trustees of the Ramakrishna Order. He

Sister Nivedita

Sister Nivedita Girls' School

Sarada Math, Dakshineswar

Matri Bhavan — a maternity hospital run by the nuns of Ramakrishna Sarada Mission

installed the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda in a small shrine in the main building, while the brahmachārinis were chanting Vedic Mantras. Swami Vishuddhananda, who was then the Vice-President, Swami Madhavananda, who was the General Secretary, and Swami Vireswarananda, one of the Assistant Secretaries, the brahmachārinis, and a large number of devotees from far and near, participated in the function. Pravrajika Bharatiprana, then known as Sri Bharati (Sarala Devi), a direct disciple of Holy Mother, was given charge of the Math by Swami Shankarananda, the President of the Math.

The Math was run by the brahmachārinis for some years successfully under the guidance of the Trustees of Belur Math. Then it was decided to hand it over to the brahmachārinis so that their work could be carried on independently.

On the 1st of January 1959, the birthday of Holy Mother, eight senior members of the Sarada Math were invested with sannyāsa by Swami Shankarananda. This was a preliminary step to the formation of an independent women's organization. On the 26th of August 1959, Sri Sarada Math was given independent status and the sannyāsinis became its Trustees by virtue of a Deed of Trust executed by the President of the Ramakrishna Math (Deed No. 4109 for the year 1959 registered on 9.9.1959). Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, though legally separate, are basically one with the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, being their counterparts.

On the 13th of May 1960 the Trustees of Sri Sarada Math, acting on the advice of the authorities of Belur Math, founded the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Association which was registered under Act XXI of 1860 (No. S/4008 for 1960-61) with the object of carrying on educational, cultural, charitable, and similar activities among women and children, looking upon them as veritable manifestations of the Divine. From the 3rd of September 1961 onwards, selected lay devotees were accepted as members and were invited to attend the annual meeting of the Association.

Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission with their branches are distinct institutions. However, they are closely linked together because the Trustees of the Math are members of the Governing body of the Mission. The main workers of the Mission are sannyāsinis of Sri Sarada Math, and both the Math and the Mission Headquarters are at Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar.

The Math and Mission both take up charitable and philanthropic activities. However, the former emphasizes religion and preaching, while the latter is concerned with welfare activities for women and children. It is necessary to point out that the use of the names of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Vivekananda by any institution does not necessarily mean that it is affiliated with either Sri Sarada Math or the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission.

Both organizations manage separate funds and maintain separate accounts. The Math fund consists of donations from friends and devotees. The Mission fund consists of fees from students, subscriptions, donations from the general public, and grants from the Government and public bodies. The Math and the Mission funds are annually audited by qualified auditors.

Activities of the Sri Sarada Math

Sri Sarada Math is not a social organization in which spirituality is just talked about. It is a purely spiritual organization which has undertaken social work in accordance with Swami Vivekananda's motto, 'self-realization for oneself and service unto others.' The focus at the headquarters is on spiritual practice, the training of probationers and brahmachārinis, religious classes, lecture tours throughout India and abroad, as well as the publication of books and journals in English and Bengali. This movement is unfolding in accordance with Swami Vivekananda's ideal of practical and applied Vedanta.

The activities of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission serve mainly women and children in all possible ways. These activities are offered throughout India and also, to a more limited extent, abroad. They include educational work, medical service, rural uplift work, relief and help for the needy, and the dissemination of the cultural and spiritual ideas and ideals of India. The branch centres of Sri Sarada Math which function in the following states are briefly described below:

Tamil Nadu:

Sri Sarada Math, Madras
7 Raghaviah Road, Madras 600017

This was the first branch centre which was started outside West Bengal in 1965. In addition to regular worship services and classes, it also houses a free clinic with x-ray facilities and a pathological laboratory.

Kerala:

Sri Sarada Math, Thrissur
P. O. Puranattukara, Thrissur 680551

The largest branch centre of Sri Sarada Math situated on eighteen acres of land, this Math runs a boarding house for school students, conducts a high school for girls, a free nursery school and an orphanage. Classes for the study of Sanskrit, typing, and computers are offered. In addition there is a private college for women. A picturesque temple was constructed in 1975.

Sri Sarada Math, Calicut
Kuneyilkavu Road, Ashokapuram, Calicut 673006

This sub-centre of the Thrissur Math was started in November 1996 and offers regular worship services as well as cultural activities for women and children.

Sri Sarada Math, Ernakulam
M. G. Road, Ravipuram, Ernakulam, Cochin 682016

This branch centre administers an old age home for women. Operated for some time under the Thrissur Math, it became a separate branch centre in September 1987. Regular religious and cultural activities are observed.

Maharashtra:

Sri Sarada Math, Pune
114, Parvati, Vitthalwadi Road, Pune 411030

Founded in 1975, this centre has a library and runs a free school for poor children. Apart from regular worship and religious and scriptural classes, it runs a homeopathic clinic and distributes free medicine, books, clothing, food, and stipends.

Karnataka:

Sri Sarada Math, Bangalore
260 Nandidurg Road, Munireddy Pallya, Bangalore 560046

Started in 1975, the centre moved to its permanent site in 1981. An informal school for underprivileged children, Sanskrit education for women and girls, Sunday school for children, and a library are offered through this centre.

Orissa:

Sri Sarada Math, Bhuvaneswar
Puri Road, Near Lingaraj Temple, Bhuvaneswar 751002

This centre was opened in 1987. Religious and cultural classes are conducted for women, as well as an informal school for underprivileged children.

Uttar Pradesh:

Sri Sarada Math, Varanasi
D36/200 Agasta Kund, Varanasi 221001

The current Ashrama was purchased in 1993 and serves as a retreat centre where classes and interviews are conducted both inside and outside the centre. The original location, while still maintained, was too small to house current activities. The original house, known as Sri Sarada Kutir, was the place where Pravrajika Bharatiprana (the first President of Sri Sarada Math), a direct disciple and personal attendant of Holy Mother and a student of Nivedita, performed intense *tapasyā* for twenty-seven years.

Uttaranchal:

Sri Sarada Math, Hardwar
Raniwali Gali, Sapta Sarovar, Hardwar 249410

Started in 1977, it serves as a retreat centre.

Sri Sarada Math, Almora
Kasar Devi Estate, P. O. Dinapani, Dt. Almora 263601

This new retreat centre, established in April 1998, is of particular significance. It was here in Kasar Devi that Swami Vivekananda, after practising rigorous *sādhanā*, received the direction for his future course of work, especially as related to women. Some welfare services for local needy women and children are provided.

Gujarat:

Sri Sarada Math, Valsad
Mograwadi
Valsad 396001

This centre was started in 2000. Apart from daily worship and observance of birthdays of prophets and saints, it has coaching classes for students from standard V to X, a library, a charitable dispensary, a Sunday School for children and other welfare activities including relief work. Students of the coaching classes are also given free tiffin.[23]

Activities of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission

Sri Sarada Math provides service to its communities through the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission. Activities offered through the Mission are 'spiritualized', as it were. All persons, irrespective of caste or creed, race, or nationality are served according to their physical, intellectual, and/or spiritual needs. This includes a harmonious blending of renunciation and service. Any education or social service provided to others becomes worship of God in man. According to the Mission, therefore, only those social services that are attuned to higher ideals are worthy of the name 'service'.

The services provided through the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Headquarters in Dakshineswar include a free medical dispensary, adult education, a school for underprivileged children, and the distribution of clothing to those in need. As listed below, at present (in 2005) there are twelve branch centres of the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission and two combined Math and Mission centres located throughout India,[24] and one branch centre in Sydney, Australia:

West Bengal (Calcutta):

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Matri Bhavan
7A, Sree Mohan Lane, Calcutta 700026

This maternity hospital was formerly a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission and was transferred to the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in 1961. It includes a well-equipped operation theatre, outdoor clinics, a specially equipped baby clinic, and a clinical laboratory. Additionally, it offers elementary education, training in handicrafts and needlework, a nurses' training centre, and financial assistance for the needy.

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Sister Nivedita Girls' School
5, Nivedita Lane, Calcutta 700003

This is presently housed in its own five buildings and follows a traditional pattern of education, while it keeps pace with modern scientific progress. It runs a secondary and primary school as well as an industrial school. There is also a boarding house for students, a publication department, and classes for underprivileged children. It was transferred to the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in August 1963.

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Ashrama
P-22, C.I.T. Road, Entally, Calcutta 700014

Opened as a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1950, it was transferred to the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in 1961. The spiritual and cultural ideas of India are offered to women through regular religious lectures, retreats, and seminars. A hostel, general library, Sunday school, adult education, and classes for needy students are also provided.

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vivekananda Vidyabhavan
33, Nayapatty Road, Calcutta 700055

This women's college, which is partly residential, was opened in March 1961. It conducts a three year educational programme leading to a degree in the Arts. It also offers religious classes and spiritual and cultural retreats, as well as computer classes. There is a library and distribution of milk and clothing to the needy.

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Shiksha Mandir
134, Baruipara Lane, Calcutta 700035

The centre was established in 1962 and conducts a pre-primary and primary school, as well as a free primary school for underprivileged children. It has a library and religious classes are also conducted. Books, medicine, financial assistance, and clothing are available for the needy.

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Siriti
44/28, Raja Rammohan Roy Road, Siriti, Calcutta 700082

This centre was opened in May 1998. A primary school for needy children is conducted; and plans have been made for an old age home for women monastics and dedicated workers of the Mission.

Rural Centres in West Bengal:

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Shillya
P.O. Ramgopalpur, Vill. Shillya, Dt. Burdwan 713403

This centre began in 1982. A primary school for children, as well as tailoring and handicraft classes for women are conducted. There is a charitable homeopathic dispensary, and clothes and medicines are distributed to the needy. Religious and cultural classes are also conducted.

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Thakurnagar
P.O. & Vill. Thakurnagar, Dt. Midnapore 721430

This centre was started permanently in 1983. Vocational training and a hostel for girls are run along with the sales of hand-made items to help participants become self-supporting. Religious and cultural classes for women are also given. Water and clothing are distributed to the needy.

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Gangarampore
Diamond Harbour Road, Gangarampore, 24 Parganas South 743503

This centre was started in 1990. A primary school for the poor children of surrounding villages is provided. Medicines, clothing, and food are distributed to the needy. Allopathy, homeopathy, eye, and baby clinics are available for women and children. There is also a vocational training centre and adult education programme.

Delhi:

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission
C-8A, Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110016

This centre came into existence in 1970 and the buildings were dedicated by Pravrajika Bharatiprana. Educational, cultural, and spiritual activities are conducted through the Nivedita Educational Cultural Centre. The Nivedita Vidya Mandir is an English-medium pre-primary and primary school. There is also elementary education for underprivileged children, as well as a Sunday school for children. Through Sarada Mandir, English, mathematics, and reading classes are offered three times a week for village girls. The centre also has a library and regular classes on the scriptures for women, and weekly moral,

religious, and cultural education for children. Food and clothing are distributed. Financial aid for students is also provided.

Arunachal Pradesh:

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Khonsa
Tirap Dist, Arunachal Pradesh 786630

This residential high school was started in 1973 to carry out educational, cultural, and charitable activities among tribal girls of Arunachal Pradesh. Special programmes designed to foster the natural talents of students in music, native folk dance, drawing, handicrafts, and wood carving are also offered. Financial aid is given to students in need, and a primary school is run to meet the needs of village children.

Kerala:

Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vidyarthini Mandiram
T.C. 24/624 Thycaud, Thiruvananthapuram 695014

This centre was started in 1973 and provides a hostel for college-going girls. A library, regular religious classes, lectures, and retreats are provided for women. Financial assistance is given to support needy boarders.

Combined Math and Mission Centres

Madhya Pradesh:

Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Indore
H-3 Scheme No. 54, Indore 452010

This is a combined Math and Mission Centre, formally opened in 1991 and 1993 respectively. Sunday school for children, as well as literacy, religious and cultural classes for women are offered. Other philanthropic work includes lectures, a retreat camp for college students, and a pre-primary and primary school for lower middle class children.

Andhra Pradesh

Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission
D. 26-15-17 Nagarampalem
Guntur 522004

This centre was started in 2001. Its main activities include, apart from daily worship, a Sunday School for children, religious and cultural classes for ladies, pecuniary help and welfare activities among women and children, a library for children, retreat camps for women, and a school from pre-primary to class X. It also provides pecuniary help to needy students.[25]

In November 2001, a new centre came up at 24/1 R. N. Tagore Road, Dakshineswar, Calcutta. On this small piece of land lived Rasik, the legendary sweeper of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple area. This centre has been therefore named Rasik Bhita, 'the homestead of Rasik'. Sri Ramakrishna had sanctified this place and blessed Rasik. This centre functions directly under the Headquarters.[26] In October 2003, a new Vedanta Retreat Centre was opened in Pangot in the Kumaon Hills, Uttaranchal.[27] Another new centre was opened in June 2005 in Shihar, the parental home of Shyamasundari Devi, the mother of Sri Sarada Devi.[28]

Since the opening of Sri Sarada Math in 1954, four centres have celebrated their Silver Jubilee with at least twenty-five years of dedicated social and educational service. These are:

- Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Shiksha Mandir, Calcutta
- Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, New Delhi
- Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Khonsa
- Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vidyarthini Mandiram, Thiruvananthapuram

A more detailed description of current activities of the Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission can be found in the General Report of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission issued by the General Secretary of the Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineshwar.

Work Outside of India

Australia

The only centre currently located outside India was founded in 1982 in Sydney, Australia. The Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of New South Wales (P.O. Box 817, Strathfield, Sydney, N.S.W. 2135) conducts regular religious and cultural activities through retreats and lectures. Food and clothing are also distributed to the needy.

Foreign Travel and Ministry

Publication of English language books which focus on Swamiji's work in the West and the lives of Western disciples, as well as a semi-annual journal, *Samvit*, which focuses on spiritual enlightenment, are well received in both India and the West. It also runs a Bengali quaterly journal named *Nibodhata*.

Since 1977, sannyāsinis of the Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission have accepted invitations from devotees in foreign countries to provide spiritual guidance, lectures, and retreats focusing on the spiritual ideals and teachings of India. Pravrajikas have travelled to Europe, the United States, Canada, South America, Australia, and Malaysia. In 1993, three Pravrajikas participated as presenters at the Centenary Celebration of the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. Many women devotees visiting Sri Sarada Math and Mission, who are dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji, are creating informal associations in their own countries to enrich and deepen their spiritual lives and answer Swami Vivekananda's call for women to solve their own problems. Foreign visitors to Sri Sarada Math and its various centres are arriving in greater numbers.

The 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration of Sri Sarada Devi

Furthermore, the 150th birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated during 2004-05 in a befitting manner in all the centres in India and abroad. Various cultural programmes, special worship, meetings, retreats, programmes for women and children, and service to the poor, etc. marked the year-long celebration. *Eternal Mother*, a commemorative volume on the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi and the golden Jubilee of Sri Sarada Math was released in a meeting held in Calcutta in November 2004. The centre in Australia also conducted several programmes. An inter-faith forum on 'The Spirit of Women' exploring the contemporary relevance of the inspiring lives and teachings of great women was held at the University of Technology at Sydney in June 2004 wherein eight women from eight different faiths spoke on great women in the past and present. A Souvenir booklet commemorating Holy Mother's birth anniversary was also released.[29] Two grand meetings held at Belur Math and Sri Sarada Math respectively in January 2005 marked the

conclusion of the year-long celebration.[30] This year-long celebration was an event of great significance that spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and, especially, Sri Sarada Devi, among a wider circle of people in India and abroad.

The Future

The rapid growth and expansion of Sri Sarada Math and the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission speaks of the tremendous need of the age. With Holy Mother's emergence into the public eye, the deep spiritual longing of women in India and around the world has become more visible. The challenge to find light in the darkness, the real in the midst of the unreal, and a path to immortality from the illusion of death, is an individual challenge to each soul. Rooted in the spiritual traditions of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda, a new means has been firmly established at last for women, which bids fair to become an important spiritual movement in the world in this twenty-first century. In Swamiji's words:

> Cultivate the virtue of obedience, but you must not sacrifice your own faith. No centralization is possible unless there is obedience to superiors.... Give up jealousy and conceit. Learn to work unitedly for others.... Purity, patience and perserverance are the three essentials to success and, above all, *love.*[31]

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PART III

Contributions of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

Ramakrishna Mission
AN OVERVIEW

SWAMI LOKESWARANANDA

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA went to the West to preach Vedanta, and he preached it extensively. As a result, some people in the West now know something about Vedanta. But Swamiji was a believer in give and take. He believed that just as the West had much to learn from India, India also had much to learn from the West. Materially, India was behind the West, and this was because Indians could not work well together in an organized way. Individually they could work, but together they could not usually work well.

Swamiji felt this was a national drawback, and India would never prosper unless this drawback was removed. Coming back home, he decided he would have a model organization. He knew the advantages and disadvantages of an organization. An organization tends to restrict individual freedom and growth. Yet Swamiji felt an organization was necessary for India. He specially wanted an organization that would be an example to the country. It would spread Sri Ramakrishna's message both by word and by its activities, and it would also work to create a new society which would be based on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. By implication he meant that the society would be a Vedantic type of society — that is, it would be a classless and casteless society.

Birth of the Mission — for Self-knowledge and for the Good of all

Soon after Swamiji returned to India he called a meeting of his brother disciples. The meeting was held at Balaram Bose's house in Baghbazar on 1

May 1897. There Swamiji explained the aims and objects of the organization he had in mind. He said that it would preach Sri Ramakrishna's message of the divinity of mankind and also show by its work how that divinity could be realized.

Swamiji's proposal was welcomed by all, and the organization came into being, bearing the name 'The Ramakrishna Mission'. Its motto was 'for one's own liberation and for the good of the world'. Swamiji framed rules for the day-to-day workings of the Mission, and the election of officer-bearers was duly carried out.

Monasticism has existed in India from ancient times, but the monks were mostly homeless. They wandered about the country and lived by begging, and they hardly ever had someone in authority over them. They did not even live in a community for long. Great spiritual teachers like Shankara, Ramanuja and others had their Orders, but the monks were not controlled by any central authority. The monks lived as they liked, free from any kind of control. If they ever stayed in a monastery for some time, they were required to abide by the rules of that monastery, but as it often happened, those rules were not enforced.

Many of the monasteries in those days owned vast acres of land and were very wealthy. Moreover, the heads of the monasteries used the income derived from the property just as they liked, often for their own comfort. There might be people around starving. It did not bother them. They argued that they were monks and as monks they had nothing to do with the people around. There might be a famine and many people dying. Even then the monks who lived in the monasteries or went around the villages did not care. It was out of this heartless situation that Ramakrishna Mission emerged as a new monastic organization with a heart. Ramakrishna Mission monks undertake different forms of social service, not out of compassion, but out of love and reverence for fellow beings who are regarded as manifestations of the Divine.

Service as a Way of Life

About a year after the Ramakrishna Mission was founded, Calcutta was struck by an epidemic of plague. Swamiji was in Darjiling at the time, resting. But when the news came, he rushed to Calcutta and asked his brother monks

to start nursing and caring for the sick. They did so, even at the risk of their lives. Swamiji himself supervised the work. Besides the monks, Nivedita also nursed the sick, and so did some college students. The Mission needed money for the work but there was none. Swamiji then declared he would sell whatever property the Mission owned in order to get the needed funds. Fortunately, Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, intervened and forbade him from doing so. Soon after, money for the relief work started coming in.

Again and again the plague hit the city, and each time the monks came forward to serve the sick. Few people at that time understood the significance of this. At first people thought the monks were crazy, but gradually they began to respect them.

Ever since the first plague relief work, the monks have been carrying on this type of work throughout the country. Yet even before this, Swami Akhandananda, a brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda, started giving relief to the starving people in Murshidabad, where there was a famine. His work drew much appreciation from the British government. The famine then spread to other parts of Bengal, and the Mission extended its help to the starving people in those areas.

Hardly a year passes when India is not hit by such natural calamities. It may be floods or an earthquake or a cyclone or something else. Whatever it is, the Ramakrishna Mission is one of the first organizations to appear with relief materials to help the afflicted people. Besides the promptness of the Mission, what distinguishes its manner of work is the love and goodwill with which it serves the people. And this love and goodwill are equal for all, irrespective of caste or creed.

When the Mission first began its work in the holy places such as Benares and Hardwar, it was something unheard of. Pilgrims came from all over India to these places, and they often fell sick from the hardships of the pilgrimage. Some even lay dying on the roadsides. There was no one to look after them. Monks of the Ramakrishna Mission then started giving medical aid to the sick and dying. Ironically, the public did not take a kindly view of it. They thought the monks were all low-caste Hindus. Far from appreciating their work, they had nothing but contempt for them.

The monks did not mind. For a long time even the monastic community looked down on the Mission. Now, for the most part, their attitude has changed

and they respect the Mission. There are still sections of monks, however, who do not approve of the Mission doing what they regard as secular work. But to the Mission, no work is secular if it is done for the good of others. To the Mission, work done for the good of others is worship.

Apart from relief work, the Mission is also well known for its work for the backward communities and for its services in the fields of education and health. But in whatever field it works, it excels. It is handicapped in many ways in money and especially in manpower — yet it gives its best by virtue of its ideology. What is this ideology? It is Vedanta. Vedanta says God is everywhere and in everything. Echoing this, both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda said that if you serve human beings you are serving God.

Ramakrishna Mission — A Spiritual Organization

Sometimes the Mission is mistaken for a social-welfare organization. It is engaged in extensive social service, no doubt. But, basically, it is a spiritual organization. Its object is to help people attain Self realization and also to help uplift human beings. It is selfish to think merely of our own salvation. We have to think of the welfare of all. In fact, we are one. As Vedanta says, from Brahma [the creator] to a blade of grass, it is all one.

This oneness of things is the essence of Vedanta. The world is one, and so also, all humanity is one. The use of 'I' and 'you' is a mistake. The diversity we see is an illusion. Underneath this diversity there is One, and that One is the Reality. The Self in us is the Reality that binds us together, and this Self is what is known as God. God is everywhere and in everything. The Ramakrishna Mission sees God in human beings and serves them as such. In fact, it worships God in the form of human beings.

The monks do different kinds of manual work, and they do it with love and devotion because they do it for God. That work is therefore worship. Whatever they do they do for God, for everything is God to them. It is not out of pity that they serve the poor — not even out of compassion. They love and worship the poor as God. To the monks, work is truly worship. This is what makes their work perfect.

The Mission is the Body of Sri Ramakrishna

The Mission has some remarkable features. The most important of them is that it is open to all — to Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and so on. It does not matter what name you give your religion. What the Mission emphasizes is that one should be truly religious and respect all religions as the same. Sri Ramakrishna is the meeting point of the religion that the monks profess. But each religion is a way to God, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say. The monks of the Ramakrishna Order believe this and practise religion that way. Truth is one, but that Truth can be described in various ways. Sri Ramakrishna preached this and also practised this. And this is what the Mission represents. That is why Swami Vivekananda said that the Mission was the body of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna represents every religion — past, present, and future; so also does the Mission.

The Mission is now more than a hundred years old, yet it is still a small organization. In spite of its many limitations, it is one of the most promising and influential organizations in the world. As a monastic Order, what is most important to it is renunciation and love of God. It is happy if it can fulfil its twin aspirations of God-realization and service to humanity. Though the monks come from different countries and different religious backgrounds, they live together as if they were from the same family. Love and goodwill bind them together. This is due to their practice of Vedanta and also due to their love for Sri Ramakrishna, in whom they find the highest ideal of Vedanta.

Small or large, the Mission centres attract people of all classes and castes. There they feel welcome, and they feel they are in a place where all are equal. The Ramakrishna Mission is an example of what Vedanta stands for and what it preaches, for it enables us to see that everything is divine. Above all, it makes us aware of our own divinity. The Ramakrishna Mission is a model on which a new world civilization can be built.

Ramakrishna Mission's Pioneering Role as a Voluntary Organization

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON RAMAKRISHNA MISSION'S CONTRIBUTIONS

C. S. RAMAKRISHNAN

THE UPANIṢAD EXHORTS:[1] 'one should wish to live a hundred years by doing dedicated service.' It sets a century as the ideal span of human life. But this time-bar does not apply to a spiritual movement which is governed by the mantra *caraiveti*, 'March on!' A century marks only its childhood. The best is yet to be. The Ramakrishna Movement that sprouted at the bedside of the ailing Great Master at Cossipore a century ago has, like the banyan tree, spread its branches wide already, but its potential for growth continues unabated. It has miles and miles to go and promises to keep. But a century is a convenient milestone for us to pause and look back with pride and satisfaction on what has been achieved so far. While examining the contributions of this multidimensional Movement, we find that it has many firsts to its credit, but here we shall confine our attention to its pioneering role as a voluntary organization serving the Puṇya Bhūmi, India.

Today the concept of the welfare state has come to stay. No longer can governments restrict themselves to the maintenance of law and order. They have to look after the supply of food, water, shelter, medical aid, education,

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[1] *Kurvan eva iha karmāṇi jijīviṣet śataṁ samāḥ* (*Īśā Upaniṣad*, 2).

irrigation facilities, and a host of other needs of the people. Governments make proud budgetary provisions for all these, but the benefits do not actually percolate to the masses. *En route* the cream gets siphoned off at various levels. Result, the rich get richer and the poor poorer. As the poet remarks, 'Wealth increases and men decay.' It is in this context that Non-governmental Voluntary Organizations (NGOs) can play a great part.

Indeed, in India at present we have a plethora of these voluntary institutions concerning themselves with the amelioration of the condition of their fellowmen in diverse departments of life. Some of them have been rendering signal service in the field of their choice and have won accolades, nationally and internationally. But there is no firm philosophy for motivating the social worker along principled channels, and so, in actual practice, tangles develop in the working of most voluntary organizations. Apart from the miasma of corruption and fraud, politics also often creeps in. A sincere worker finds his path blocked by perverse forces, and a feeling of frustration overwhelms him. He finds himself taking a u-turn. Love changes to hate and he may start working against the very cause he had been long nurturing. Cracks develop in the organization leading inevitably to splits and unhealthy rivalry. The path to hell, as they say, is paved with good intentions.

It is against this backdrop that we must study the evolution of the Ramakrishna Movement which comes as a whiff of fresh air. Sri Ramakrishna himself started the Movement. He was a unique phenomenon. He was *Purāṇa Puruṣa*, *pura* and yet *nava*, ancient and yet modern. He was the quintessence of India's eternal wisdom, but being a practical scientist to his fingertips, he took incredible pains to revalidate the scriptural truths through exacting experimentation in his own life and re-presented them in a form most suitable to modern man.

One day, while the concept of compassion according to Vaishnava tenets was being discussed, Sri Ramakrishna, emerging from ecstasy, burst out: 'Compassion for creatures! You fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth, you to show compassion to others! Who are you to show compassion? No, not compassion for others, but rather the service of man, recognizing him to be a veritable manifestation of God.'

Everyone present there heard those words, but it was Naren (the future Swami Vivekananda) who alone understood the profound significance of this revelation. Outside the room he said to the others:

> What a wonderful light I have discovered in these words of the Master! How beautifully he has reconciled the ideal of Bhakti with the knowledge of the Vedanta. The usual idea is that the practice of the knowledge of Vedanta demands a complete withdrawal from society and a rooting out of all such sentiments as love, devotion and compassion. Cherishing hatred of the world and of fellow creatures, thinking them impediments to spiritual attainment, the aspirant goes astray. But it is God alone who has manifested Himself as the world and the created beings. Serving man knowing him to be the manifestation of God purifies the heart and accelerates the aspirant's progress towards the goal. If it be the will of God, the day will soon come when I shall proclaim this grand truth to the world at large. I shall make it the common property of all, the wise and the fool, the rich and the poor, the Brahmin and the Pariah.

Another day when the Master asked Naren what he wanted, Naren said he wished to remain in samādhi, once in a while coming down to the sense plane to eat a little food. Thereupon the Master exclaimed: 'Shame on you! Don't be such a small-minded person. You should be like a banyan tree affording shade and shelter to thousands.' Here again the idea of service to fellow men as the means of realization was stressed.

Naren thus understood that a *jñāni* must become a *vijñāni*. A *jñāni* realizes that Brahman alone is real, so he gives up the world. But the *vijñāni* takes the further step. Having known that there is nothing apart from Brahman, he realizes that it is Brahman who is manifested as the world and its beings. So, instead of running away from one's fellow beings, one must worship them by serving them — *śiva jñāne jīva sevā*.

The Master had charged Naren with an onerous mission. But no great task can be accomplished without the necessary energy. The Master who commissioned him, gave him also the power. Three or four days before his mahāsamādhi, Sri Ramakrishna called Naren, and looking at him intently, entered into deep meditation. Naren felt a subtle force, akin to an electric shock, entering his body. He lost outer consciousness. When he came to, he found the Master weeping. He said: 'O Naren, today I have given you my all and have become a fakir. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you.' Sri Ramakrishna had, by his incredible *sādhanās*

performed for over a dozen years, acquired tremendous spiritual powers, and now Naren was their possessor.

The mission was there, the power was there, but how to use this power to execute the mission? The Master had not given any detailed guidelines except a couple of hints. Unable even to speak because of the throat cancer, he wrote on a piece of paper, 'Narendra will teach others.' When Naren hesitated and said, 'I won't do that', the Master said: 'You shall have to do it. Your very bones will do it.' Naren would be a world teacher, a spiritual teacher. The second hint was the Master's committing all the other boys, the would-be monks, to Naren's charge. Naren would lead the Ramakrishna brotherhood.

The Master had thus prepared the field and sown the seed for the Ramakrishna Movement. He had emphasized renunciation and service as the obverse and reverse of the same coin. But what can be the *modus operandi* for this paradox? How to serve the world by renouncing it? The ball was in Naren's court. Spiritual athlete that he was, Naren took up the challenge soon after the Master ended his play on the stage of the world. He decided to find out at first hand what the world needed. Hence his three year peregrination as a wandering monk, mostly on foot, throughout the motherland. He mixed freely with princes and peasants, the rich and the poor, the learned and the illiterate, all castes, learned all about their hopes and fears, and shared their joys and sorrows. In his own words, he became a 'condensed India'. On the one hand, the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of India flowing majestically down the millennia thrilled him, while on the other, his heart bled to see the poverty and ignorance, ill-health and superstitions of the teeming millions exploited by the prosperous few.

How to restore the land to its pristine glory? The answer came to him while meditating on the rock in the ocean off the coast of Kanyakumari, the land's end. He hit upon a plan. Spirituality is the backbone of Indian culture; thus the uplift of the masses must be through spirituality. A new Order must be created of bold, dedicated, hardy, untiring, unselfish monks who would move from village to village, spreading education and enlightenment among the people and helping them to live as dignified human beings. He remembered his Master's words that Vedanta is not for empty stomachs. The hungry and the ignorant must be fed and taught. This conviction propelled him to go to the West. He would obtain social and financial support from the materially opulent West and in return give them the invigorating message of Vedanta.

Helped by devoted young men of Madras like Alasinga Perumal and rulers like the Maharajas of Khetri, Mysore, and Ramnad, he left for the West. How he made history on the platform of the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago and successfully convinced the Western nations of the greatness of India, standing for universal love and brotherhood, is now a golden page in the annals of East-West relationships.

Returning to India in 1897, Swamiji outlined his plan of campaign in the public addresses he gave at Madras. His was a holistic approach. In the comprehensive national regeneration he envisaged, all, including the down-trodden masses, would be given every opportunity and assistance for their uplift. Man-making education would be the spiritual rock on which the edifice of progress would rise. Women too should be empowered to stand on their own feet. He did not believe in patch-work reform and wanted reform from below, not from above. For he was firm in the conviction that given proper education and adequate opportunities, the people themselves would be able to shape their future. Also, he did not believe in class struggle. He was for levelling up and not levelling down. Privileges must go, and the haves must willingly share their assets with the have-nots.

To put these ideals into practice he founded the Ramakrishna Mission (May 1897) with the motto *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca*, 'for the individual's salvation and the service of the world'. Traditional Hindu monasticism stressed the cultivation of spirituality rather than charity or social service. It was given to Vivekananda to fuse the monastic ideal of renunciation and spiritual enlightenment with the concept of organized service under the banner of a monastic Order whose members would be well trained both in the ancient ideals and in modern methods of organization and management.

By including active social service as an essential part of the sannyāsin's spiritual discipline, Swamiji had initiated a revolution in a double sense. No longer should a monk confine his activities exclusively to study, meditation, and holy wanderings. Nor should a social worker approach his task with a view to building up a career promising material rewards such as money, power, position, and prestige. Renunciation and service should go hand in hand. The spirit of renunciation should inspire the one who does social service. The Ramakrishna Movement, soaring on the twin wings of renunciation and service, has been a role model as much for monks as for social workers.

It was Swamiji's brother disciple Swami Akhandananda who first gave concrete expression to the novel ideal. In his *Smriti Katha*, he has touchingly narrated how during his pilgrimage at Dadpur he was moved by the plight of a Muslim girl, clad in rags, weeping bitterly as the only earthen jar she had was broken and there was no water at home. Swami Akhandananda had only a four-anna with him. With that he purchased an earthen jar and some parched rice for her and the other famine-stricken children who now crowded round him. He gives a harrowing account of the famine that raged in the Murshidabad district and how he moved heaven and earth to give relief to the famished at Mahula. Two features of this pioneering relief work are worth noting. Swami Vivekananda insisted that Akhandananda should be methodical and practical and should keep accounts correct to a paise. Also, he insisted that reports of the work should be published in the newspapers. This is against tradition for a sannyāsin who has freed himself from bondages. But Vivekananda's sannyāsins should be systematic, modern and transparent in their public activities. Today when the Ramakrishna Mission is handling crores of rupees of public money while doing gigantic relief work, fully audited accounts are published and not a paise goes unaccounted.

The second point is the social significance of the relief work. Swami Vivekananda wrote with joy how brahmin boys were serving cholera patients of the lowest caste without any hesitation. While others were denouncing caste and at the same time adopting measures that perpetuated the system, the Ramakrishna Movement has quietly enabled the social workers, monastic and lay, to ignore caste barriers and work as comrades. The intellect of Shankara can work in unison with the heart of the Buddha.

The relief operations by Akhandananda culminated in his opening an orphanage with a school attached at Mahula and this later became the nucleus of the Mission Ashrama at Sargachi, whose educational, philanthropic, and spiritual ministrations are widely appreciated.

The ashrama at Kankhal is another trend-setter. Seeing the suffering of the ailing monks at Hardwar and Rishikesh, Swami Vivekananda commissioned the ever-ready Kalyanananda to go and look after them. Living on alms, Swami Kalyanananda and his dedicated assistant Swami Nishchayanananda opened a two-room dispensary at the nearby village of Kankhal and attended not only to sadhus but also to other poor ailing people. Often the Swamis had to carry

the patients on their backs. Orthodox sannyāsins considered such activities reprehensible in monastics and used to avoid the two Swamis, calling them *bhangi sadhus*, scavenger monks. But as the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission continued their humanitarian work ignoring criticism, the tide turned. Gradually the orthodox monks began to realize what essential and noble service the selfless Kankhal Swamis were rendering. Today the pendulum has swung in the other direction and religious functions at Hardwar are often delayed pending the arrival of the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission. Selflessness works.

The pioneering role of the Ramakrishna Movement is readily discernible in the quiet blossoming of many of its now prominent institutions like the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service in Varanasi which started with limited means 'to provide food, shelter and medical aid to destitute pilgrims, helpless widows and aged persons lying ill on the streets and ghats of the city'. The Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Madras, was started by Swami Ramakrishnananda as a refuge for a couple of Coimbatore boys orphaned by plague; the Ramakrishna Math at Thrissur was started by Swami Tyagishananda as a school and students' home for harijans. The plague relief work at Calcutta in 1899, done under the personal guidance of Sister Nivedita and Swami Sadananda, is another landmark. They worked with broom and basket in lanes from which the professional sweepers had fled because of the stench, till the sweepers too stepped forward to help them. If there was an uncared-for patient, the Swami would take care of him. The inspiring stories of these trendsetting institutions will be narrated in the following pages.

In fact, it would fill volumes if we were to record the pioneering work done by the Ramakrishna Order for the uplift of Indian masses, which include its activities in the areas of spiritual and cultural development, rural welfare, tribal welfare, educational services, medical services, women's uplift, and relief and rehabilitation work done during disasters caused by famine, flood, plague, fire, earthquake and landslide, cyclone, drought, and cholera, etc. However, as an introduction to this section dealing with its activities and contributions, it is enough to say that the infection has been caught, and today even time-honoured, highly orthodox religious institutions try to add some social service to their traditional activities. And voluntary social organizations are often at pains to point out that they are working for higher goals and ideals and that it is selfless service that gives them personal satisfaction.

The purpose of a perfect organization, it is said, is to enable a common man to do uncommon work. Salutations to Swamiji who, by establishing the Ramakrishna Mission, has enabled innumerable ordinary men and women to produce extraordinary results.

Ramakrishna Mission and the Uplift of Indian Masses

SHIV SHANKAR CHAKRABORTY

Swami Vivekananda's Vision of the Uplift of the Masses

In the course of his travels all over India as a mendicant, Swami Vivekananda saw with his own eyes the utter poverty and backwardness of the poor masses. 'In this country of ours, the birth-place of Vedanta, our masses have been hypnotised for ages into that state. To touch them is pollution, to sit with them is pollution! Hopeless they were born, hopeless they must remain! And the result is that they have been sinking, sinking, sinking and have come to the last stage to which a human being can come.'[1] From this observation of Swamiji it is quite obvious how deeply he was concerned about the poor masses. It is well known that one of the reasons for Swamiji's going to the West was to seek financial help for his project for the uplift of the poor. While he was on tour in the West he went on writing letters to his monastic brothers, disciples, and friends in India to take up the work for the downtrodden people. While requesting them to undertake welfare programmes for the masses he also indicated the methods one should adopt following the experiences and the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna himself. Sri Ramakrishna himself raised the pertinent question, 'If God can be worshipped through an image why shouldn't it be possible to worship Him through a living person?' 'Does God exist only when the eyes are closed, and cease to exist when the eyes are opened?'[2] Fortunately, he himself resolved the question by expounding his wonderful doctrine of service to men as worship of God.

In this connection we may mention here that mass welfare work was actually initiated by Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi themselves during their lifetime. A few illustrations are presented below with brief descriptions culled from their biographies.

Distress Relief at Vaidyanath Dham Initiated by Sri Ramakrishna

'The Master's heart was filled with compassion to see the poverty and misery of the village people when going through a village near Vaidyanath at the time of his pilgrimage to Kashi, Vrindavan, and other holy places with Mathur. "You are", said he to Mathur, "but a manager of the Mother's estate. Give these people sufficient oil to cool their heads and each a piece of cloth to wear and feed them to their fill once." At first Mathur was a little hesitant and said: "Father, the pilgrimage will require much money, and the poor are too many. I may later be in want of money if I begin to do all that. What do you advise under these circumstances?" But the Master was not satisfied with his reply. There was an incessant flow of tears from his eyes to see the misery of the villagers and his heart was filled with an unprecedented compassion. "You rascal, I will not go to your Kashi. I will remain here with them; they have none to call their own; I will not leave them behind and go." Saying so, he became obstinate like a boy and went and sat down amongst the poor people. Seeing such compassion in the Master, Mathur had bundles of cloth brought from Calcutta and did as Father [Sri Ramakrishna] had asked him to do. Filled with joy to see the villagers happy, Father bade goodbye to them and started gladly with Mathur on his journey to Kashi.'[3]

Holy Mother's Participation in a Famine Relief at Jayrambati

'When she [Sri Sarada Devi] was eleven years old (1864), the countryside was ravaged by a terrible famine. Her father had garnered some paddy; and though he was by no means affluent, he was moved so much by the appalling misery around that he opened his granary and started a free canteen. The Holy Mother described it thus: "What a dire famine raged there once and how many starving people came to our house! We had stocked the previous year's produce. My father had the paddy husked into rice and got potfuls of *khichudi* (hotch-

potch) cooked by mixing it with black lentils.... On some days the number of people became so great that *khichudi* ran short. Cooking would restart at once. No sooner was the hot food served on the leaves than I would fan it with both hands so that it might cool quickly. For, alas, the hungry stomachs could not brook delay!"'[4]

Basic Principles

Swami Vivekananda, as an ardent follower of Sri Ramakrishna, worked out a detailed strategy for the welfare of the masses. His principles of action in this respect are based on the following ideas:

- Each soul being potentially divine, given the opportunity, everybody can manifest himself or herself to a level of excellence.
- People should be given help not by way of charity but by way of service to them as embodiments of God.
- The best way to help people is to educate them so that they may work out their own salvation.
- Education has to be meaningful in the sense that it will enable the people to make use of their resources both human and natural to the fullest extent possible.
- For the purpose of development an attempt should be made to use both indigenous technology available within the country as well as the best possible science and technology available in the Western world.
- No development can be sustained unless a sustainable organization is built to carry on different activities.

When we analyze the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission in the field of mass uplift, we notice that most of the activities pertaining to the welfare of the masses have tried to follow the above guiding principles of Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna Mission's welfare activities for the masses have been so broad and all-pervasive that it is difficult to give even glimpses of the same in a single write-up. Nevertheless, in the following pages the bare spectrum of these activities will be discussed.

Programmes of Mass Uplift

The Ramakrishna Mission's programmes for mass uplift can be classified into the following categories:

- Spiritual and Cultural Services
- Rural Development
- Tribal Development
- Education for the Masses
- Medical services
- Relief Work

Since this volume contains (in the following pages) separate articles on the last three categories, we shall deal only with spiritual and cultural services, rural development, and tribal development.

Spiritual and Cultural Services

Swami Vivekananda wanted to deluge the land with spiritual ideas and also uplift the masses. He was of the firm opinion that just as we should be physically and intellectually strong, we must also strengthen our spiritual foundation so that the so-called economic development does not destroy our moral fibre. With that end in view he wanted his brother disciples to spread, even during his lifetime, the message of Sri Ramakrishna throughout the length and breadth of the country and also popularize the Indian cultural heritage. He himself encouraged celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday in different Mission-run institutions and also in the other communities for the education of the masses. All the branch centres of the Ramakrishna Mission therefore observe various socio-religious festivals along with the regular worship of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda in their respective temples. Over the years these celebrations have become extremely popular, and lakhs and lakhs of people join in the festivals. Organizing regular study circles, work camps, supply of religious and cultural books to village people through mobile libraries, slide shows, film shows, songs, dances and dramas, etc. are normal features on these occasions. Besides the abovementioned general programmes, since the 1970's it has been noticed that quite a large

number of centres and also private ashramas have taken up special programmes in the following manner:

- The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi Hills, Ranchi, organizes in the tribal villages youth groups named 'Vivekananda Seva Sanstha' which are not only organizing socio-economic development programmes but also conducting various study circles amongst the youth to spread the ideas and ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. There are 70 such centres in the district of Ranchi which have already created impact not only in the district but also in other areas of the State.
- The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta, is an internationally acclaimed Institute which, along with its normal work within its premises, organizes a large number of Vivekananda Study Camps in different parts of the state. The special feature of these camps is that these programmes are organized with community participation. About 100-120 young people come together for a day, from morning till evening, and participate in intensive discussions about different aspects of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda philosophy and how these can be applied in their day-to-day life. The programmes are also enlivened by the inclusion of various cultural shows in the evening. From January 1992 to July 1999, 438 of such conferences and study camps were held and 1,41,600 young people participated in them. The Institute also published and distributed suitable literature on relevant subjects in Bengali, English, and Hindi languages free of cost or at a nominal price. Year after year the demand for such camps and conferences is on the increase, but the Institute is handicapped due to shortage of funds.
- The Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, has organized two unique associations, viz. Vivekananda Balak Sangha and Vivekananda Yuvak Sangha — cultural and recreational centres for boys and youth respectively. The boys of the Balak Sangha come in thousands to the Ashrama in the afternoon and participate in various community services within the premises, such as cleaning, gardening, and attending to the guests, etc., and they also participate in various musical programmes both before and after the prayer. This group also undertakes various developmental activities outside the Ashrama whenever necessary.

- The Mangalore centre of the Mission runs a Balak Ashrama, a Sunday school for children 8-16 years of age. The activities include classes on moral values, chanting the *Gita*, singing of bhajans, and classes on Indian culture and spiritual heritage. These young adolescents are selected from the areas around the Ashrama.
- The Salem centre in Tamil Nadu runs a unit named Balak Sangha for children 9-14 years of age. Classes are normally held on Sundays involving subjects on moral issues, singing of bhajans, and various types of community work.
- The Ramakrishna Mission Janasikshamandira at Belur Math organizes cultural activities for boys coming from the surrounding Belur slums. More than 200 such boys participate in various programmes organized by Janasikshamandira. The programmes are held every day of the week except Sunday and include games and sports, community activities, vocational training, and religious and cultural classes. The Janasikshamandira also runs extension programmes for youth in the villages and small towns through youth clubs, primarily in the districts of Howrah and Hooghly.
- Under the Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad, Narendrapur's primary programmes are being implemented through youth organizations in 12 districts of West Bengal. These comprise not only developmental activities but also study circles, elocution competitions on the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda, and organizing of village fairs and exhibitions, etc.
- In recent times, new projects like the *Viveka Murasu Village Awareness Programme*, *Jñāna Vāhini*, and *Prajñā Vardhini* have been initiated by the Madras, Mysore, and Pune centres respectively. The first two projects aim at carrying the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda to the interior villages of their respective States. They reach the masses by organizing bookstalls, exhibitions, and religious meetings with the help of audio-visual aids. They have received an overwhelming response. *Prajñā Vardhini* aims at developing the potential of the youths of the economically weaker sections of society and making them ready to face the challenges of today's competitive world. It helps the youths mould their character according to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideal and helps them stand on their own feet.

- The Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Malda and Saradapitha centres have been engaged, since 2003-04, in programmes for higher orientation of the inmates of the nearby jails — now called 'correctional homes'. This is a unique venture in which the jail inmates are provided, along with higher orientation, non-formal education, vocational training, and health awareness.

Since the 1970s, another trend has become noticeable. At the suggestion of the various centres of the Ramakrishna Mission and Math many private ashramas are coming up in different parts of the country, numbering now more than a thousand. These ashramas have also established temples and prayer halls, and also educational and cultural centres which conduct regular discourses on spiritual topics. To coordinate and improve the activities of these private centres, the Mission headquarters has set up another organization called the 'Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishad'. This is a federal body currently having a membership of 701 such centres located in different towns and villages in various parts of the country. Being affiliated with this Parishad, they get support from different branch centres of the Math and Mission as well as the headquarters for consolidating and improving the programmes of their ashramas. A common code of conduct has been formulated jointly with the monks, who are generally the guiding factors in making these programmes successful.

From the above account it can be seen that besides its formal institutions conducting educational, medical, and relief programmes, the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission also gives importance to mass-based programmes aimed at promoting religious and cultural values amongst the population of the country at large. In celebration of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, besides worship, bhajans, etc., Nara-Narayana Seva and mass rallies with thousands of people participating are normal features. Through these programmes it has been possible to strengthen the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement in the country right from its inception. Thus the cultural programmes are as important for the spiritual revival of the masses of our country as the other programmes like relief, medical services, and rural and tribal development. The above are but a few examples of the nature and strength of the programmes being organized by the Mission.

Rural Development — Pre-Independence Period

From its very inception the Ramakrishna Mission has tried to organize its activities in the rural areas based on the principles mentioned earlier. In fact, before the Mission was established as a registered organization, rural development work in a small way was started by Swami Akhandananda as early as 1894 in some remote villages in the state of Rajasthan. Swami Akhandananda, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, while moving about in the area as a wandering monk, observed the distressed conditions of the rural people caused by their various superstitions and ignorance, and he wanted very much to do something for them. Having a strong desire to help these people, he wrote to Swami Vivekananda in America seeking his permission. In reply Swamiji wrote to him, 'The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted — let these be your God.' He advised Akhandananda: 'Go from door to door amongst the poor and lower classes of the town of Khetri and teach them religion. Also, let them have oral lessons on geography and such other subjects.... Go to other villages from time to time, and teach the people the arts of life as well as religion.'[5]

Inspired by Swamiji, Swami Akhandananda began his work in Khetri with some financial help from the Maharaja of the State. As Swamiji always put emphasis on educating the masses, Akhandanandaji started teaching the poor children in those remote villages, and he moved from door to door requesting the parents to send their children to the school started by him. He also tried to remove various superstitions of the rural folk and integrate these people into the mainstream of national life. Subsequently, under the leadership of Swami Akhandananda, a long term educational development work was started in 1897 in Mahula, in the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal. In fact, his experiments in rural welfare work became the path-breaker for the entire service programme of the Ramakrishna Mission during the decades that followed.

During the early years of the Ramakrishna Mission, several innovative experiments were initiated by self-sacrificing monks under extremely difficult circumstances. Some of these programmes are given below:

In 1927, Swami Sambhavananda, a young monk, initiated welfare work among the poor and illiterate people of Coorg in Mysore. In addition to the educational and health programme, his major achievement was the economic

rehabilitation of honey collectors from the forest who were extremely poor. He observed that the method of collection and processing was not scientific and developed a new method, known as 'Coorg Standard Hive', which has become extremely popular amongst bee-keepers and is used even today. He also organized a Honey Producers' Cooperative so that they could get a better price for their product.

Swami Ashokananda initiated development work for the poor cobblers of Habiganj in Bangladesh in early 1910s. As their methods of work were unscientific, their income was low, and they were also looked down upon by the upper classes as untouchables. To improve their production, he sent some cobblers to Calcutta to undergo training and on their return formed a Cobblers' Cooperative to enable them to improve their economic condition. Then to remove their stigma of being untouchables he rechristened them 'Rishi'. In course of time the social image of the cobblers underwent a change in view of these developments.

Between 1926-27, Swami Istananda worked in the Sagar Island in the Sundarban area in West Bengal. His major achievement during his 40 years of service to the Islanders was the propagation of education, particularly in the primary and secondary levels, in this isolated pocket comprising several villages. Even before Independence, Sagar Island had the highest percentage of literacy compared to other areas of undivided Bengal. He also combined formal education with vocational training for the economic rehabilitation of the people.

Some of the early experiments of the Ramakrishna Mission in the area of rural development have been mentioned here in brief by way of illustration as to how this important work was initiated by the self-sacrificing monks of the Ramakrishna Order. If we analyze the examples already given, we come to the following conclusions:

- First of all, being inspired by Swamiji's call for renunciation and service, the monks of the Order did not hesitate to jump into uncharted areas, and they faced various threats and challenges almost single-handedly. In course of time, of course, they requested local workers to help them in their work. There was total involvement in undertaking these experiments. Moreover, this was the period when India was under British rule, and the British would obstruct all constructive pro-

grammes undertaken by the independent-spirited monks of the Ramakrishna Order. But with dogged determination they went ahead with their mission.

- Secondly, the early experiments focused mainly on education and health care. But during this phase the aim was not mainly to establish educational institutions but also to initiate a process of learning and awareness so that people could realize their own potentialities.
- Thirdly, having no external resources, they totally depended on community support and community resources. It is really astonishing that even during the colonial time people were hesitant to come forward to help themselves. Besides community support, natural resources of the area were adequately harnessed so that the people were not to depend upon an external support mechanism to a large extent.
- Last but not least, despite having a common approach based on Swamiji's ideals, each experiment had its own distinctiveness. No two programmes were exactly alike. This speaks of the creative initiative of the leaders of the movement and also their ability to inspire the spirit of innovation among the masses.

These experiments further proved that if a person-to-person relationship is established based on total unselfishness, the hidden potential of the person offering the help and the people receiving the help can be unfolded to an unlimited extent. All these bear eloquent testimony to Swamiji's vision of development.

Rural Development — Post-Independence Period

Till now we have seen some outstanding examples of the rural development programme of the Mission in the early years of its existence, particularly during the pre-Independence period. We will now look into some of the experiments made during the post-Independence period in different parts of the country. Independence brought both joy as well as sorrow — joy, because we could feel free to decide our fate without any foreign intervention, and sorrow, as the partition of the country caused agony and suffering to millions of people who had to migrate to India from East and West Pakistan. Naturally, in both

eastern and western parts of India, the Mission had to shoulder much responsibility for refugee rehabilitation.

Besides the refugee rehabilitation programme, all the centres of the Mission, big or small, had to take up some form of rural development work among the rural people, mainly in the form of formal or non-formal education or in the field of socio-economic development. During the Presidentship of Swami Vireswarananda, the tenth President of the Order, it became almost obligatory for the centres to render some services for the rural poor of the country.

Janasikshamandira of the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha near Belur Math initiated adult literacy through slide shows, libraries, and crafts programmes, etc. through local youth groups. It also organized a number of vocational training programmes for working children of the slums around Belur Math.

The Ramakrishna Mission Samaj Sevak Sikshanamandira was established under the auspices of the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha in the year 1986 in order to train workers who will devote their lives to community development in rural and urban areas. This attempt may be considered as a sort of cadre-building programme for promoting institutional development in rural and tribal areas in different parts of the country, particularly in West Bengal.

At the instance of Swami Vireswarananda, a separate unit called 'Pallimangal' was established at Belur Math in 1980. This unit is primarily working in Kamarpukur and Jayrambati to promote various types of crafts and industries such as the mini jute mill, weaving, tailoring, candle making, agarbatti manufacturing, etc. It also runs a soil testing laboratory and a mobile medical unit.

The Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad, one of the biggest rural development units of the Mission, initiated its programmes in 1955-56 with its headquarters at Narendrapur. This Parishad primarily works through 267 youth organizations and 12 district level organizations. The project, catering to more than 5000 villages spread over 12 districts of West Bengal, focuses on literacy, child care, health education, integrated rural development, and environmental promotion through integrated pest management, joint forest management, promotion of smokeless chullahs, biogas plants, sanitary latrines, solar panels, etc. Besides the abovementioned comprehensive rural development programmes, the Parishad has also initiated a multi-dimensional vocational training programme at Narendrapur through six district-level Parishad-affiliated

organizations. Vocational training is imparted in sixty vocations based on specific local needs. It also runs several training programmes, being a national and regional resource centre where both official and non-official level people are trained. The Parishad has also a large publication unit for the benefit of neo-literates, and it brings out a monthly journal, *Samaj Siksha*, for its development workers.

From the account of the tribal and rural development programmes implemented by the Ramakrishna Mission over the past century, it will be noticed that it has certain characteristics which are very much consistent with the basic philosophy of the Mission. As the spirit behind the establishment of these development programmes for poor people is based on Indian religious and cultural values, the consequential impact on the people being served by the Mission is far-reaching and positive, affecting not only those benefited directly but also the society at large. The following are some of the special characteristics of the Mission's tribal and rural development programmes:

- The Mission initiates development in a given area not through a single entry point approach. Thus, where simple primary relief is given, it not only provides food but also provides health care and awareness generation programmes about the different aspects of the disaster.
- Leadership development and cadre building is another area which has been taken up very carefully so that the work can be sustained by local human resources.
- The cadre building approach helps in promoting institutional development resulting in the establishment of a stable social structure which becomes self-supporting, and which functions even when the Mission withdraws from the scene.
- While implementing the programmes in different parts of the country, the Mission has some distinct philosophy and objectives, but while still pursuing the same philosophy and objectives, the programmes are invariably different from area to area. Thus, some innovations are always tried in the field of tribal and rural development.
- Along with the mobilization of resources from outside, the Mission puts much emphasis on the mobilization of local resources, both human and material.

- The community-based approach has made the institutions promoted by the Mission automatically sustainable both from an organizational as well as from a socio-economic perspective.
- In many places the implementation of the Mission's programmes has resulted in far-reaching socio-economic changes in the area without getting involved in political dialectics — for example, the impact of the sanitation programme in West Bengal, the construction of Vivekananda bridge in Andhra Pradesh, earthquake rehabilitation in the Latur district of Maharashtra, etc.
- Whether in rural or tribal areas the programmes are primarily implemented with people's participation. Hundreds of volunteers participate in the Mission's programmes in implementing various rural and tribal development programmes without any hesitation. They participate as significant partners in the Mission's rural and tribal development work.

Service among the Tribal People

Sri Ramakrishna's relief work amongst the tribal people near Vaidyanath Dham on his way to Varanasi, as stated in the beginning of this article, was quite significant, and it shows his concern for the poorest of the poor of our country, of whom the tribal population constitutes about 8% (in different regions of the country, however, the percentage may be as high as 25 to 30% of the population). Similarly, Swami Vivekananda himself had deep love and affection for the tribal people which he developed through his long years of pilgrimages, or *padayātrā*, throughout the length and breadth of the country. He studied the rich cultural life of the tribal people and was extremely pained seeing that they are the most exploited group of our society.

While at Belur Math, a group of Santhals used to work at the newly acquired property of the Math, and Swamiji would often sit with them discussing their life and way of living. Amongst them there was one named Kesta Santhal with whom Swamiji was especially friendly. Once Swamiji told him that he wanted to entertain them with a meal. To that, Kesta responded that they would not be able to accept the food, as being married they are forbidden to take food cooked with salt by other people. Knowing their custom, Swamiji promised to give them food without salt and he arranged accordingly.

The Santhals were very happy to get the food and Swamiji also was extremely happy as he felt that he was able to really serve the Narayanas by feeding these simple tribal people. After this, Swamiji said to the sannyāsins and brahmachārins of Belur Math:

> See how simple-hearted these poor illiterate people are! Can you mitigate their misery a little? If not, of what use is your wearing the ochre robe?... How I wish to demolish the barriers of 'Don't-touchism' and go out and bring together one and all, calling out, 'Come, all ye that are poor and destitute, fallen and downtrodden! We are one in the name of Ramakrishna!' Unless they are raised, this motherland of ours will never awake.[6]

In this way service to the tribal people was initiated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and the tradition has been maintained by the Order for the last one hundred years. While conducting the tribal welfare services, the Mission has tried to follow certain principles which are distinctly different from conventional tribal welfare programmes generally implemented in the country. The special features are as follows:

- While conducting the programmes the Mission tries to ensure that the basic cultural heritage of the tribals and their religious beliefs are respected.
- At the same time they are made aware of those cultural practices which are harmful to them with regard to their livelihood in the context of the changing socio-economic environment.
- While upholding the above principles the Mission also makes the tribal people aware of the cultural milieu of the country as a whole and also new technologies which are essential for their socio-economic development. It is a matter of regret that often in the name of development we uproot the tribal people from their cultural and socio-economic environment, resulting in complete disorder in their means of support and speeding up the process of their migration from rural to urban and bigger metropolises. This is creating significant unemployment among the newly-educated tribal people which is one of the main reasons for the unrest in many of the tribal communities of our country.
- To enable the tribal students to integrate new technologies with their

environment, suitable vocational training programmes are imparted along with general education.

- In many tribal areas where the Ramakrishna Mission is working, it is trying to invigorate the tribal institutional structure so that their traditional institutions can become effective tools for modern development.

Swamiji observed that senior people of the village used to meet under a banyan tree or at a Chandimandap and discuss various issues pertaining to village problems. These traditional meeting places had a very creative role in ancient times. How Swamiji's observation was correct will be illustrated by the following incident, in which the author too was involved, in course of initiating developmental programmes in tribal and backward villages. In 1959 there was a severe flood in the Howrah district, and Saradapitha organized relief work for 15-20 days in the Domjur area. After the primary relief work was concluded, there was some balance of funds which the Mission authorities thought of utilizing to rebuild individual houses, many of which were severely damaged by the flood. But the claimants being many, the available funds were inadequate for the purpose. Then the people came forward with the suggestion that since the money was not enough for everybody, it could be utilized to rebuild the Chandimandap for Rajapur village which was the meeting place for 3 or 4 neighbouring villages. The Chandimandap was a mud house and had totally collapsed. As the author was involved in this work, he was not very willing to use the money for that purpose. But being advised by the then Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Swami Vimuktananda, the work was undertaken. A pucca structure with tile roof was constructed for the Chandimandap, and with some remaining funds, some sort of an office and a guest room was built adjacent to the Chandimandap. In course of time the village people organized a youth club called 'Rajapur Vivek Sangha' which eventually became a vibrant village development centre for 4 or 5 villages around the Chandimandap. The Chandimandap is used even now for annual religious celebrations like Durga Puja, etc. and also as a meeting place for resolving community problems. The author had similar experiences in many other tribal areas. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the residents of Rajapur village are primarily of the Bagdi community -- not scheduled tribe but scheduled caste.

Because of unprotected contact with the urban environment the tribal people are acquiring many complicated diseases for which the Ramakrishna Mission, in all its tribal welfare centres, has started integrated health services for their benefit. As many as 23 centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are working in a concentrated way amongst the tribal communities. Some are primarily in the field of education while others provide medical and health services to the people living in the remote areas. These centres are distributed in 12 states of the country. Besides these, almost all other educational institutions run by the Ramakrishna Mission always have some tribal students who are given free education as long as they are unable to proceed on their own. Herein we are discussing a few of these cases which have had significant impact on the tribal people of the concerned areas.

A very interesting experiment was conducted in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills by Swami Prabhananda (Ketaki Maharaj) during pre-Independence days under difficult circumstances to promote education amongst the tribal children. In organizing the educational programmes he took special care to protect the children from the impact of Western education and culture, and he encouraged them to continue to respect their own religion and indigenous way of living. Besides, he also integrated the educational programme into the mainstream of Indian livelihood systems. He established a large number of primary schools in these areas and a model high school at Cherrapunji. It is now one of the best educational centres in the state of Meghalaya. Besides school education, he also initiated various rural crafts programmes for the rehabilitation of the local people. While organizing these activities he had to continuously fight against the Christian missionaries.

'Divyayan', the rural development wing of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi Hills in Bihar, is an important landmark in the history of tribal development. During the decade-long sufferings of these people plagued by famines during 1956-67, the Mission initiated an experimental project that primarily aims at preparing the young tribal people of the Santhal Parganas to undertake developmental work in their own villages. Its training programme has got two components, viz. general leadership development and vocational specialization. When the participants return to their villages, they are expected to take up development programmes, both for their own benefit and for the benefit of the local villagers. The vocational training comprises crop husbandry,

horticulture, poultry keeping, carpentry, bee-keeping, mulberry and silk cultivation, introduction of new agricultural technology, social forestry, and many other related developmental activities. Besides the vocational programmes, 'Divyayan' also promotes, among other things, adult literacy, sanitation programmes, distribution of quality seeds, setting up of libraries, digging of wells, and construction of low-cost latrines. It works in about 70 tribal villages in the Ranchi district of Jharkhand.

The Jamtara branch of the Ramakrishna Math, founded in 1921, launched its tribal development programme in the early 1980s. It included agricultural assistance in the form of provision of seeds, fertilizers, technical know-how, and insecticides to the tribal farmers who were never used to modern methods of cultivation. Eight non-formal schools, having about 650 tribal children, are an integral part of the tribal programme of this centre. A medical clinic is also run by the Math for the tribal people for both general as well as TB patients. Its intensive work amongst the TB patients has gone a long way in eradicating the disease from many villages. This Math also works in the villages through local tribal youth groups.

The Mysore branch of the Mission has been working in three 'talukas' of Mysore district since 1982. Its target areas are inhabited by tribal people who do not have any understanding of modern agriculture. The Ashrama mainly concentrates on an economic development programme for their benefit. The programme provides agricultural implements including bullocks and organic and inorganic manures, and focuses on soil conservation work and reclamation of uncultivable lands, besides introducing sericulture and horticulture, protecting farms from elephants by way of electrical fencing, helping with low-cost housing, supplying electricity to the tribal households, bee-keeping, fishery, etc. The major agricultural breakthrough achieved in the area is the introduction of 'sprinkler irrigation' for economic and judicious use of water, thus enhancing the horticultural production. The Ashrama also supports an educational programme for tribal children by helping with construction of school buildings. In the area of health and education, two associate organizations, viz. 'Girijan Kalyan Kendra' and 'Vivekananda Youth Movement' are playing the major role.

The Abujhmarh Tribal Service of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur, is another landmark in the history of the Mission's efforts to serve

the rural and tribal people. In 1985, the Ashrama started work amongst the Hill Madhia of Abujhmarh, a primitive tribal area in the district of Bastar, Madhya Pradesh. The Madhia or the Hill Madhia, as the Abujhmarh tribe is called, is considered the most backward tribe living in the area flanked by the Godavari and the Ganga. No organization, including the Government, could approach these people before the Mission broke their isolation. The Madhias thought that the so-called educated people come to the hills only to exploit them. Hence they always avoided outsiders, and at times attacked the workers of other agencies. But the self-sacrificing attitude of the workers of the Ramakrishna Mission won them over in a short time and the Mission was successful in setting up a number of educational and other institutions such as a vocational training school, an indoor hospital, a mobile dispensary, a fair price shop complex, and an agricultural training-cum-demonstration farm. Students of the school are now securing the highest marks in district examinations and have already earned a good name in the State of Madhya Pradesh. To help the women, the Mission is working in cooperation with the Vivekananda Institute of Health, Welfare, and Social Service. The latter is running girls' hostels and has engaged itself in the construction of roads and culverts in deep forest areas. Recently it has accepted an Integrated Child Development Scheme sponsored by the Madhya Pradesh Government. As a result of this joint initiative, the tribal people respond favourably to the Mission's approach and they take the Mission into great confidence.

The rural health and welfare projects of the Ramakrishna Mission, Bombay, were started in 1972 to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the centre. The work was initiated at Sakwar village, Taluka Vasai, District Thane, about 82 kilometres from Bombay. The projects cover about 50,000 tribal people. The activities of the Mission comprise health, education and medical services, vocational training, tailoring, promotion of agricultural facilities including the introduction of high-yield crops, residential training for Adivasi youth in agriculture with emphasis on development of leadership qualities, etc. Promotion of cultural activities, classes on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement, and the observation of important religious festivals also form an integral part of the programme.

The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Rajkot, established in 1927, along with its other activities, started work among the tribal people in Garbada

sub-division in the district of Dahod in Gujarat. It works in 15 villages around the Sri Ramakrishna Samaj Mandira at village Neemuch. It runs a hostel for 50 schoolboys 5-10 years of age and gives them educational support till they reach the secondary standard. It also runs an outdoor medical clinic with occasional special camps for eye treatment and dental care. By providing borewells and check dams, the Ashrama is helping about 250 families in the area through the technology of watershed development. It also excavated a large village tank for common use by the village people. The area being drought-prone, these facilities have given a boost to the agrarian economy of the people.

The Tripura centre of the Ramakrishna Mission located at Viveknagar (Amtali), in addition to its regular school, has 147 tribal boarders as regular students. It is also running a vocational training centre with about 123 tribal youths. These services to the tribal people of Tripura have enhanced the image of the Ramakrishna Mission amongst the various indigenous people of this state.

The Ramakrishna Mission, Along, Arunachal Pradesh, is running a higher secondary English-medium school for the tribal people with a roll strength of 1,975 including 604 girls. It also has a hostel for tribal boys and vocational training units in dairy, poultry farming, agriculture, carpentry, bee-keeping, etc. It also runs an audio-visual unit which screens films in the remote villages for the benefit of the indigenous people.

While going through the detailed activities of the centres working for tribal welfare, the following special characteristics emerge:

- In all the educational centres of the Mission, besides the general students, some tribal students are always given facilities to have education up to the highest level, entirely free of charge. In some cases separate hostels are being run for tribal boys, such as at Narendrapur, Bhuvaneswar, Puri, etc., and in some places they are offered common facilities with the general students. This arrangement helps the integration of tribal and non-tribal cultures of the country.
- Some centres of the Math and the Mission run medical centres exclusively for tribal people, such as at Itanagar, Rajkot, Rajahmundry, etc.
- Some centres are exclusively educational centres for tribal students like

Along and Narottam Nagar in Arunachal Pradesh, and Cherrapunji in Meghalaya.

- In all the educational centres where many tribal students are studying, they are also encouraged to undergo vocational training in subjects related to their environment. This helps them to be properly rehabilitated after completion of their education.
- One of the major problems in the education of the poor tribal and rural children is the high drop-out rate leading to high illiteracy in our country. Even in the state of West Bengal it is as high as 40% because of the many defects in our primary education system. But, fortunately, in the Mission-run institutions, there is no such problem either in the normal schools or in the schools run for the tribal children. This leads to a high rate of literacy in the villages surrounding the Mission centres.
- Though there has been no fact-finding study, from general observation it is noticed that the students passing out from Mission-run schools normally do not join the army of educated unemployed youth as is happening in most of the tribal areas. It is not even happening in the case of those families where children are the first generation learners. This is mainly because the children's general education is integrated with vocational education and they develop positive and constructive views of life and society. This enables them to play an effective role in their communities in the course of time.
- Another very important aspect of the educational policy of the Ramakrishna Mission for the tribal students is that they develop respect as much for the Indian ethos and culture as for their own tradition, rituals, etc. As the Mission does not believe in conversion, it has been possible to improve the socio-economic environment of these communities without much tension or conflict.

The next article sheds further light on the different aspects of Ramakrishna Mission's activities for tribal welfare.

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Ramakrishna Mission's Work for the Tribal People

SWAMI GAUTAMANANDA

One of the revolutionary teachings of Sri Ramakrishna was 'Serve the jiva as Shiva'. Whenever an opportunity presented itself, he was ready to serve people. He served many suffering, famine-stricken people with food and clothing at a village called Deoghar when he was on his way to Benares and Vrindavan. His famous disciple, Swami Vivekananda, would feed the poor tribal (Santhal) labourers engaged in construction work at Belur Math with such joy that he would shed tears, remarking, 'I have today fed the true Narayanas.' This grand legacy left by the founders of the Ramakrishna Mission later found expression in its various beneficial activities during disasters like famine, flood, fire and riot, and also in combating ills like poverty, illiteracy, and different kinds of suffering. One such activity is its work among the tribal community of India.

In India the tribal people generally live in secluded places — forests and hills, away from the advanced sections of society. In Article 46 of the Indian Constitution, we find 'Scheduled Tribes' mentioned but not defined. A pre-Christian edict of Ashoka reads, 'Upon the forest tribes…the Emperor has compassion.' It is thus evident that the tribal communities in India have lived in peace with the rest of the society for the last two-thousand years. It was only when the British colonists started tampering with the tribal society in the third quarter of the eighteenth century that the problems of Indian tribal community began.

The British enacted the Scheduled Tracts Act in 1874, the Backward Tracts Act in 1919, and the Excluded Area Act in 1935, all of which were politically motivated, meant to segregate the tribal people from the main-stream society. According to the 1981 census, tribal people in India numbered more than 5 crores (5,16,28,638) out of a total population of 69 crores. They lived in large numbers in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. Among them 89.39% professed some branch of Hinduism, 5.35% Christianity, and the rest belonged to 52 clannish religions.

One of the factors that moved the Ramakrishna Mission to work among the tribal community is the exhortation of Swami Vivekananda: 'Keep the motto before you — elevation of masses without injuring their religion.' He further wrote: 'Can you give them (the masses) back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? This is to be done and we will do it.' The situation in tribal areas in India was the exact opposite. Tribal people were being converted to Christianity of various hues, and hence their age-old value-based life, i.e. their individuality, was disappearing. Let us see how the Ramakrishna Mission started repairing the damage. The plan was based on the two basic principles of the Mission:

- Respect for all religions, and hence non-proselytization.
- Education for the all-round — physical, intellectual, emotional, and moral — growth of the students.

The brief history of some of the important educational institutions started by the Ramakrishna Mission has been presented in the next article. We shall discuss here the contribution made by the Ramakrishna Mission in the field of tribal welfare in India.

The Beginning

The Ramakrishna Mission started its work in Meghalaya way back in the 1920s. Its Cherrapunji centre was officially affiliated in 1931. Swami Prabhananda (Ketaki Maharaj) started primary schools at Shella, Cherrapunji, and Shillong. He was ably assisted by younger swamis in imparting the man-making education advocated by Swami Vivekananda. He introduced homeopathic and biochemical medicines, and also improved methods of potato

cultivation, which was their staple food. In the teaching of the alphabets, an innovation was made — music and poetry were introduced. Thus by singing a few couplets, the students could master all the fifty odd alphabets. Swami Chandikananda, who had a flair for singing and composing, could write quite a number of songs in the Khasi dialect, the themes of which were the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. He has, in a way, become inextricably associated with the Khasi people through these songs.

In this way, through these educational institutions, their pride in their own tribal culture (dress, decoration, dance, festivals, etc.) silently started growing. The folk-dances of Cherrapunji and other places began to come into prominence, especially when they were taken up by the educated youths who were getting modern education in the Ramakrishna Mission schools. This helped the Khasis to some extent from being swept off their feet by the onslaught of the Western culture. These educated Khasi young men later started a SENG KHASI (Pure Khasi) movement, which works for the preservation of the best values of life in their tradition, along with spreading modern education. The liberal concept of respect for all religions practised by the Mission has attracted students of many sects of Christianity, which were engaged in conversion. Thus the Catholics and Protestants of Khasi, Garo, Mizo and Naga, and also the Kachari and Jaintia groups, started joining our school along with Hindu students. It thus became a laboratory of the harmony of religions where all respected the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

On the anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, a large procession of our students (mostly non-Hindus) and the public passes through the streets of Cherrapunji singing the glories of Sri Ramakrishna. Our school hostel in Cherrapunji has a prayer hall where pictures of Christ and Buddha are kept on the altar along with those of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. Even local people join in our prayers.

Khasi Culture

Some of the ethical codes of the Khasis are worth emulating. One among them is non-stealing, *asteya*, as it is called by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sūtras*. No Khasi would steal other's things. If any Khasi inadvertently drops or leaves a

kerchief, a hat, or a money-bag, or, for that matter, anything, on the road or elsewhere, all that he has to do is walk back the same path and find his article lying where it was dropped. No one would even touch an object that was not his or hers. I have seen boys and girls leaving their umbrellas, instrument boxes containing small cash, etc. in their classrooms, but no one will take other's belongings.

As the schools were upgraded up to class VIII in the late 1930s, a great need was felt for opening a high school at Cherrapunji. It was strange that the foreign missionaries, who were running numerous schools in Meghalaya for almost a century, i.e. from 1840 onwards, had never opened a high school till then. When the Ramakrishna Mission earnestly went ahead to open one at Cherrapunji, the missionaries too tried to open similar ones and compete. But the D.P.I., an Englishman, refused permission, quoting the existing regulations against opening high schools in close proximity to the ones already functioning, unless it was filled to capacity. Thus, this first ever high school of South Meghalaya, having 45 primary and middle schools as feeders, all under the Ramakrishna Mission, has become a pioneer in the secondary school education of the Khasis.

The number of students in this school went beyond 500 in the 1960's, with an equal number of boys and girls, thanks to the unprecedented encouragement the girls received from their mothers. The Khasis perhaps are the only matriarchal society in India besides the Nairs of Kerala. However, more power is wielded by women in Khasi society than in Kerala. For example, once when I visited one of our primary schools, I found the number of benches in the classrooms too few for the whole class. The compromise arrangement, in which a part of the students would sit on the floor, was put into effect with boys sitting on the floor and the girls occupying the benches. The boys did not complain at all, because they were brought up like that. For instance, a 5 or 6-year-old girl in a family would be given some money by the mother, which she always carried in a small bag hanging from her shoulder. Her brother did not get this privilege, with the result that the superiority of the girl was impressed on him even from that young age. Further, it was the girl who inherited the family property from the mother; children took the surname of their mother and not of their father; and the bridegroom lived with his in-laws after marriage.

For those of us hailing as we did from patriarchal families, it took a long time to learn this new sociological situation in Meghalaya, in which a Khasi girl is considered the way we consider a boy in the plains in matters of taking decision and work-efficiency. In this connection I remember a funny incident. A headmaster of one of our middle schools was influenced by some of his Khasi friends who had been educated in Calcutta. He had joined their secret society for establishing a patriarchy in place of the existing matriarchy in Khasi society. Once, when he returned home at dead of night after attending a secret meeting of the society, his wife, who had somehow come to know of the fact, refused permission to her husband to enter the house. At last he had to apologize for attempting such a move and promised her never to repeat it again. Only then did she admit him into the house.

The tribal people in general appreciate men of strong will who take bold, though sometimes harsh, decisions. I have noticed them appreciating one of our swamis as 'a tiger' (*sakaiah* in Mizo language) because of his strong will and bold decisions. A Governor or a Deputy Commissioner would be praised only if he is a strong disciplinarian along with being benevolent, not otherwise.

The Khasis believe themselves to be the descendants of a Burmese Queen, hence their matriarchy. Physically hardy, mentally quite intelligent, and artistically endowed with sweet voices and a sense of rhythm, they are good singers and dancers. Some of them are hereditary worshippers of a snake-god called U-Thlen. These worshippers are called 'Nongshuno'. This worship, they believe, enables them to get good crops, health, etc. But the difficulty lies in that the U-Thlen is to be propitiated annually with human blood, which is not possible nowadays. Hence, to get exonerated from the hereditary responsibility of U-Thlen worship, one has to throw all one's belongings into the fire of his own burning house. Even the educated youths of the Ramakrishna Mission schools believe that a 'nongshuno' cannot be killed by any physical means. Even Christians continue their hereditary U-Thlen worship.

Similar is their idea of not using pipe-water. When the Ramakrishna Mission constructed a water reservoir and offered to connect pipelines to their houses free of charge, the conservative Khasis refused. It took several years for them to change their attitude.

Expansion of the Tribal Work

Since 1922, alongside this work with the people of Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia hills, Ramakrishna Mission has been working for the uplift of scheduled castes and tribes at Thrissur and Kalady in Kerala, Manasadwip in West Bengal, Puri and Bhuvaneswar in Orissa, and Anckal and the B.R. Hills area in Karnataka.

Around 1966, a new field for the Mission's tribal service opened up when an invitation came from the Government of India to start centres in Arunachal Pradesh on the borders of China and Burma, some 600 kilometres away from Guwahati, the capital city of Assam. The choice of the Government fell on the Ramakrishna Mission because of its liberal principles of (1) non-proselytization, (2) non-sectarianism, i.e. treatment of all people as equal, irrespective of religion, caste, sect, or sex, and (3) national outlook featuring a synthesis of science and religion on the basis of Vedanta, and thus imparting a most modern scientific and technological education along with the values of life which encourage all to be good and do good. Between 1966 and 1979, in that inaccessible place Ramakrishna Mission started three centers, viz. at Along, Narottam Nagar, and Itanagar, the first two being educational, and the third, a hospital centre. I remember the hesitation of the Gallong tribal people at first to send their wards to our hostel and school. Later they did gladly send their children. If the parents wanted one of their children studying in our school to visit home, the elder son from the family would come and say, 'Sir, please allow my brother to visit the village and keep me instead in his place until he returns.' This shows their ignorance as well as their simplicity. These Arunachalis — about 50 tribes in all, with a population of 7 lakhs — are hardy, fearless, and daring. They live peacefully amidst the snakes, tigers, elephants, and oxen, which abound in the area.

At last the general Arunachali tribes welcomed the Ramakrishna Mission school at Along. For the first time they saw their children getting the best English medium education, with Hindi, Sanskrit, and science too, without any fear of conversion. On the contrary, the Ramakrishna Mission encouraged their traditional religion and culture through the composition of songs in their dialects of Gallong, Mynyong, etc. In this connection, the Ramakrishna Mission, for the first time, started publication of literature on Indian culture in the

Adi dialect. Some thirteen titles have since come out and the publication work is continuing. These books have become quite popular, especially among students, who feel proud about everything in their culture. Thus they have succeeded in shedding the inferiority complex so deeply rooted in the tribal psyche. This accounts for the relatively quicker progress of the Arunachali tribal people than others in the northeast. An incident will illustrate this point. One of our girl students went to study in a college at Shillong. Her Christian friends there went on pressing her to change her traditional name to a Western Christian name, and her traditional religion to Christianity. Though a single girl pitted against the whole class, she did not budge an inch throughout the period of 2 years of her stay there, after which she returned home and settled down marrying a doctor of her own tribe.

This faith in themselves has made the Arunachalis succeed in assimilating much good from both the Indian and the Western cultures without being swept away by a mere cheap imitation of the West, as has happened with the tribes of Nagaland and Mizoram. You can meet Arunachali students in the metropolises of both South and North India carrying on their studies and living happily with their friends in the plains because of their knowledge of Hindi and English. They are also learning Hindustani and Karnatic music, the different dance forms of Bharata-natyam and Kathak, and also tabla, sitar, and other musical instruments. One is astounded at the national sentiments the Arunachalis imbibe through their education in the Ramakrishna Mission schools. In these schools, the entire student community repeats during their morning assembly the following 'National Integration Oath' of five sentences of Swami Vivekananda:

- I am an Indian.
- Every Indian is my brother.
- India is my life.
- India is my heaven.
- In India's welfare lies my welfare too.

I got the feedback of the effect of this daily oath when I was in Calcutta on an educational tour of our girl-students of class IX. One day, our eleven girls were waiting for a bus in Calcutta when some Bengalis, noticing their uncommon features, remarked, 'They are Chinese.' Immediately one of our girls loudly protested: 'We are not Chinese. We are Indians. We are Aruna-

chalis.' Needless to say, the Bengalis were silenced by this vehement reply, and also perhaps due to their becoming aware of their own colossal ignorance.

Social Reforms

Swamiji often said that social reforms follow in the wake of good education. This has happened with the Arunachalis. Students from practically all the States of India study in our schools spread throughout the country. They mix with each other like members of a big family and learn each other's manners and customs. Thus the Arunachalis have adopted the Rakhi and Holi festivals, and also Hindi language and songs. Even as a child one of our tribal girls studying in class IX had been married to another child. Her in-laws sent a court notice to her saying that as she was sufficiently grown up now, she should give up her studies and join her husband's home. Noticing this promising girl in dire distress, I was worried. But to my astonishment, in the village court she declared before the Deputy Commissioner that she was not bound by the Tribal Child Marriage Laws, which had been outlawed by our Constitution. She never looked back afterwards until she completed her MBBS and was appointed as a doctor in the Government Hospital in her own district. Similarly, many young people have given up drinking and even smoking in order to scale greater heights of interaction with the mainstream society brought about by the Ramakrishna Mission education.

Another consequence of good education was the disappearance of ignorance regarding modern medicine. When we established the first full-fledged hospital in the capital of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, the Nishi and Apatani tribal people were not very impressed. But slowly they were, as our sincere doctors picked up patients from roadside villages and brought them back to health. The following incident is interesting to note in this connection.

A tribal patient near our hospital, dehydrated due to dysentery, was almost unconscious and was thought dead by the neighbours. He was then picked up by our doctors and put on intravenous fluid drip for a full night. In the morning he started improving and was quickly back to normal. The joy of the tribal people knew no bounds. They said: 'Here you see a dead man being brought to life by Mission's doctors! Why should it not be so? Even one injection, as we have seen, is so effective, and here they have injected him throughout the night!'

Once, when dysentery became an epidemic in a village, I visited it. The people, we heard from the Government health officers, were demoralized at the virulent incidence of the disease and would not listen to the advice of basic hygiene and medical treatment. But when I announced that I would eradicate the epidemic if they followed our regulations of using and drinking only boiled water etc., they immediately agreed to obey. When I lifted two dehydrated patients into our medical van to be treated at the District Hospital, they agreed to go on condition that they both be repatriated to their village, dead or alive, by our own vehicle. I could return only one case alive, as the other case did not respond to intravenous fluid treatment. But the villagers were so happy at my having kept my word.

Thus, Ramakrishna Mission's work among the tribal people of Arunachal has been progressing from strength to strength. It is bringing these neglected people into the mainstream of national life through character-building education and imparting of values like truth, purity, faith in one's own inherent powers and in God, and also selfless service to society. One can hear Arunachali boys and girls saying with pride that they study in the 'Mission' school, 'Mission' meaning 'Ramakrishna Mission'. In today's Arunachal Pradesh, one can see among the Ministers, MPs, MLAs, and middle school teachers, products of Ramakrishna Mission schools rendering valuable service to their community.

New Work in Madhya Pradesh

With this valuable experience, the Ramakrishna Mission now ventured into a new field of tribal work. In the Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh, Abujhmarh is a hilly tract spread over an area of 25,000 square kilometres. Twenty-thousand people of the 'Madhia' tribe have been dwelling there for the past 800 years, totally unaware of civilization. 'Abujh' means unknown. and 'marh' means hillocks. When the government of Madhya Pradesh felt helpless in trying to reach these nomadic groups through their government machinery, they requested the Ramakrishna Mission to take up this challenging work. In 1985 the Mission accepted the challenge. First of all, even to reach the Madhia people's dwellings and contact them was a task for which one had to walk 50 to 60 kilometres, sometimes crawling on all fours. In the beginning these people would not allow us to open any of our service centres. 'You better go away

and leave us alone', was their curt reply. We had to cajole them by promising to feed their children four times a day as well as provide them schooling. That made them yield.

Thus we started primary boarding schools where the boys and girls are being provided proper clothing and regular food along with lessons. To each school is attached a 'Fair Price Shop', selling basic commodities like salt, rice, dal, kerosene oil, etc. to the tribal people. It also purchases in turn their minor forest products such as honey and broomsticks. Also attached to the school is a medical helper. He administers simple medicines prescribed by the doctors visiting the tribal people every week through the mobile medical service. There is an agriculture assistant attached to every school teaching improved agricultural, horticultural, and kitchen gardening methods to the students as well as to the villagers. For this purpose, each school has a 15-acre plot of land attached to it. As the villagers, who were earlier being cheated in the weekly bazaars held in the nearby plains, got the right price for their products (Rs. 28 for a kilogram of honey in place of Rs. 10, and Rs. 6 for a broomstick instead of Rs. 1), their purchasing power grew. They started purchasing bicycles in larger and larger numbers as the best means of transport. Those who had been going practically naked till then, now started wearing shirts and pants, cholis and sarees. It was earlier alleged that they were averse to clothes, but it has been proved that it was their poverty that kept them in nakedness.

As usual, the ignorance of the Madhias made them vulnerable to exploitation by forest officers on one side, and police on the other. Hence they were very afraid of the officers in 'Khaki'. When the swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission were found selflessly helping and serving them, the news went round that these 'officers' were sannyāsins. Selflessness and service endeared the swamis to the Madhias so much that later on whenever there was a conflict of ideas between the swamis and the Naxalites, who were hiding and training in those very areas where the Ramakrishna Mission schools were situated, the Naxalites had to yield to the work schemes of the Ramakrishna Mission. For example, when the Ramakrishna Mission was putting up a culvert across a rivulet to make a road to a village, the Naxalites stopped the work. When we reported this to the Madhias of the beneficiary village, they immediately went to the Naxalites and asked them not to interfere with the construction of the bridge which was for their benefit.

Divyayan, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi

Tribals being given training in bamboo craft at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi

Self-help group for women at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi

Monks of the Ramakrishna Order conducting relief work after the havoc caused by tsunami in 2004

Tribal boys undergoing physical training at Ramakrishna Mission School, Narottam Nagar

Tribal children learning carpentary work at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur

Tribal children being trained at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur

A bridge on Vruddha Gautami River, Andhra Pradesh, built by Ramakrishna Mission under its Andhra Pradesh cyclone rehabilitation project

Once, at night, another Swami and I went into a Naxalite camp near our village just to meet the leader. It was pitch dark at about 7 p.m. I went past two sentries with guns after giving my credentials to them. Then passing through a gathering of Madhias, which was being addressed around a campfire by four gun-totting Naxalites, two of whom were women, I reached their leader seated behind another gunman under a shed. During the course of our conversation, the leader admitted that he admired our services to the tribal people, and hence would not interfere with our work. Only he warned against any of our men informing the government of their movements. The next day's newspapers announced that a new and dangerous group of 7 or 8 Naxalites with two women had entered the Madhia area. I was perhaps the first to meet them face to face, in their own den.

Our schools in Abujhmarh (six primary, three middle, one high, and one higher secondary) came into existence in quick succession. It gives them the best education, which is not only academic but also vocational, including training in carpentry, agriculture, poultry, fishery, fruit gardening, tailoring, printing, typing, drawing, painting, etc. It also provides them training in Hindustani music, both vocal and instrumental, and also in sports like football, volleyball, kho-kho, gymnastics, and table tennis. Within a short span of three years, the Ramakrishna Mission school at Narainpur stood second in football and gymnastics at the state level. The school's band is the best in the state and has taken part in the Republic Day Parade at Delhi. Due to the comprehensive education imparted by the Ramakrishna Mission schools, the Madhya Pradesh government has declared it to be a role model to be followed by all the other tribal schools in the state. Within the short eleven years of Ramakrishna Mission's work among this Madhia tribe, the tribal students of our schools, first time in their tribe's history, were seen studying advanced courses in the science, engineering, and medical colleges of Madhya Pradesh. In five villages in the interior of Abujhmarh, five stop-dams across the rivulets have been constructed, and the large reservoirs of water have made these villages self-sufficient in drinking water and water for agriculture. This has become a boon for pisciculture and teak plantations as well. Even tigers, cheetahs, and bears reap the benefit of these reservoirs. Thus the Madhias are on the path of progress through education and economic well-being. They may even lead other tribal communities in India before long.

Bihar-Jharkhand Tribal Work

Finally, let us briefly look at the development of the tribal people of Jharkhand through the efforts of the Ramakrishna Mission 'Divyayan' at Morabadi, Ranchi. It is an institution that strives to educate and elevate the illiterate tribal people in the rural areas of Jharkhand. In a unique experiment under the Ramakrishna Mission, 6 batches of 250 rural tribal people are taken every year and trained in improved methods of agriculture, horticulture, kitchen gardening, dairy work, poultry raising, bee-keeping, sericulture, maintenance of agricultural pumps and implements, etc. Besides these, they are also trained in physical exercise for good health. They are taught singing of devotional songs. They also learn, through daily reading, the life-giving message of Swami Vivekananda — the message of divinity and equality of man, and of dedicated service, through which grows one's own as well as socitey's wealth and strength. These trainees, after they return to their rural areas, spread their new knowledge of all-round development through selfless service to others by running night schools to eradicate illiteracy. Above all, they spread the message of Swami Vivekananda — the message that Indians should arise and awake to their innate spiritual strength, and through that, build a healthy, wealthy, and wise nation. A new awakening is seen among the tribal people of Ranchi who have made the Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Divyayan 'one of the best centres engaged in rural and tribal development in the country, and best in Jharkhand-Bihar belt'.

The Ramakrishna Mission has thus been serving the tribal people in India for nearly 90 years. In the process, it has gathered rich experience with which it would serve them better in this 21st century.

Ramakrishna Mission in the Field of Education

SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

MEN OF GOD APPEAR periodically on the earth to redeem and free humanity. That this is the purpose of their coming has been acclaimed in all the religions of the world. What do they free humanity from? From misery and suffering. Sri Krishna declared in the *Gita*: *Teṣāmaham samuddhartā mṛtyu-samsāra-sāgarāt*, 'I am their Redeemer from the ocean of samsāra which is death.' Jesus Christ said: 'Come unto Me, ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I shall give thee rest.' Buddha renounced the world and its pleasures urged by a compelling inner call to find a way out of sorrow for the whole of humankind. Swami Vivekananda, following his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, said time and again that he would be eager to come repeatedly to help humanity be free from sorrow.

The root cause of misery is ignorance, called *avidyā* in the Vedanta philosophy. This is an age-old discovery made by all the great men of God, the Saviours of humanity. It logically follows, therefore, that to get rid of misery one should destroy ignorance. How does ignorance go? By knowledge. Ignorance is proverbially figured as darkness, and knowledge, as light. The light of knowledge dispels the darkness of ignorance. Darkness of a thousand years can be dispelled in a trice by striking a match, and, in exactly the same way, ignorance vanishes instantly with the dawn of knowledge, as Sri Ramakrishna was wont to say. 'Those whose ignorance has been destroyed by the awakening of knowledge, have their knowledge shining as bright as the light of the sun' (*Gita*, 5. 16). It is therefore that knowledge is considered very sacred: *Na hi*

jñānena sadṛśam pavitram iha vidyate (*Gita*, 4. 38). And 'this knowledge should be acquired from competent teachers (*ācāryas*) by humility, by eager questioning, and by devoted service' (*Gita*, 4. 34).

Swami Vivekananda's Idea of Education

The method and process by which knowledge is traditionally acquired by a disciple from a teacher is called education. This knowledge or *vidyā* has been classified into two types: *aparā-vidyā* and *parā-vidyā* — lower and higher knowledge. This division, however, does not imply superiority or inferiority of knowledge, but is a way of denoting its objective and subjective contents. *Aparā-vidyā* is knowledge of the objective universe, whereas *parā-vidyā* is knowledge of the Subject — the Knower, not as an agent of the process of knowing but as the Eternal Subject, the veritable embodiment of knowledge as Awareness or Consciousness. Materialistic sciences cultivated in the West concern themselves with the objective reality, that which is perceived, seen, and experienced. Spiritual science, called the Science of all sciences (*sarva-vidyā pratiṣṭhā*) in the Upaniṣads, cultivated in the East, deals with the subjective reality, which is the Perceiver, the Seer, the Experiencer. The former, the objective reality, is known as the *kṣetra*, the field of knowledge. The latter, the Subject, is called the *kṣetrajña*, the Knower of this field. The knowledge of the *kṣetra* is *aparā-vidyā*, and the realization of the Knower, the Self, the Atman, is *parā-vidyā*. The Orient has cultivated the science of *parā-vidyā*, while the Occident, the science of *aparā-vidyā*. Now comes the grand question, viz. is it possible to combine these two ideals and create a new order of civilization in which the best elements of both worlds, spiritual idealism and materialistic practicality, Eastern religion and Western science, inner realization and outer perception, are harmoniously blended 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many' — *bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya*? Swami Vivekananda (referred to hereafter as Swamiji), perhaps for the first time in the history of humankind, propounded a grand synthesis of the two ideals. And like the GUT (Grand Unification Theory) of modern physics, Swamiji believed this unification scheme, this harmonizing and mingling of the two ideals, would usher in a new world order. This is, in fact, an echo of the message in the *Gita*: *Kṣetra-kṣetrajñayor-*

jñānam yat tat jñānam matam mama, 'In My [Lord Krishna's] view, that is real knowledge which combines the knowledge of both the outer (objective) and the inner (subjective) realities.'

Swamiji's scheme of education should be understood in the light of his vision of a new world order as mentioned above. Through the lever of education he wanted to create a band of men and women who would combine in their lives the spiritual idealism of the East and the material practicality of the West. 'Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instinct?' Swamiji asked. And he answered: 'This is to be done, and we will do it. You are all born to do it.'[1] Swamiji's aim in starting various educational institutions to teach the so-called secular subjects like modern sciences, technology, vocational-oriented sciences, arts, English, etc. on the one hand, and the so-called spiritual subjects like the ancient Upaniṣads, Sanskrit, Vedic literature, etc. on the other, was to create a complete human being, all-round and fully developed in the three 'h's — heart, head, and hand. It is in this light that his statement that Belur Math would ultimately blossom into a full-fledged university is to be understood. The entire history of the Ramakrishna Mission's educational endeavour should be studied and comprehended against this vision of Swamiji.

The Method of Actualizing Swamiji's Vision

The *Gita* talks about three essential things to be cultivated by every human being: *yajña*, *dāna*, and *tapas*. Swamiji has spoken of these very things in the following terms: renunciation and service, and the fire of *tapas* that sustains them. By renunciation he did not so much mean sannyāsa as *tyāga* (sacrifice). In fact, he said that *tyāga* and *sevā* (service) are the national ideals, and that once we intensify India in these two channels, the rest would take care of itself. Both sacrifice and service imply unselfish love, which Swamiji felt was the only motive force at the back of all life and existence. This then is Swamiji's method: *tyāga* and *sevā*, corresponding to the *Gita*'s *yajña* and *dāna*, with the fire of *tapas* as their constant sustaining force. And this is to be accomplished by a combination of the four yogas, viz. *bhakti*, *jñāna*, *karma*, and *dhyāna*. It means the combination of the heart to feel, the brain to conceive, the hands to

work, and the power of concentration coupled with detachment, invigorating each of these.

Swamiji categorized *dāna* into four kinds, viz. *anna-dāna*, *prāṇa-dāna*, *vidyā-dāna*, and *jñāna-dāna*. They correspond to the *annamaya* (physical), *prāṇamaya* (vital), *manomaya* & *vijñānamaya* (mental & intellectual), and *ānandamaya* (spiritual) dimensions of the human personality respectively. Accordingly, Swamiji's plan of action for the Ramakrishna Mission's *karma-yajña* is four-fold: relief and rehabilitation, health & hygiene, education, and spiritual service, conforming respectively to the four categories mentioned above. Ramakrishna Mission's contribution in the fields of medical service and relief and rehabilitation has been discussed in the next two articles respectively. The subject of this article is the Ramakrishna Mission's contribution in the field of imparting education — *vidyā-dāna*.

Types of Educational Institutions Started by the Ramakrishna Mission

The following are the major types of institutions started at different times during the 108 years of Ramakrishna Mission's existence to actualize Swamiji's educational vision as described above:

1. Schools: pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher secondary levels, imparting general education.
2. Colleges: imparting graduate and post-graduate education in science, humanities (including languages), commerce, and vocation-oriented subjects, with facilities for higher research at the doctoral/post-doctoral level.
3. Sanskrit schools: imparting knowledge of the Sanskrit language and literature at the secondary/higher secondary level.
4. Sanskrit college: imparting knowledge of the Sanskrit language and literature at the graduate/post-graduate level.
5. Vedic school: imparting Vedic education at the secondary/higher secondary level.
6. Schools of languages: imparting knowledge of language skills in Indian and foreign languages.

7. Teachers' Training Colleges/Institutes: imparting teachers' training at the basic/graduate/post-graduate level, with facilities for higher research in education at the doctoral/post-doctoral level.
8. Junior technical & industrial schools: imparting technical and vocational education & training at the secondary/higher secondary level.
9. Polytechnics: imparting technical education in various branches of engineering at the diploma level.
10. Agricultural schools/institutes: imparting education/training in agriculture and horticulture at the diploma level.
11. Librarianship training centre: imparting training in librarianship to rural trainees.
12. Students' Homes & Hostels: attached to residential schools/colleges/institutes run by the Mission as well as by others, attempted to be modelled on the *guru-griha-vāsa* system.
13. Orphanages: housing destitute children and grown-up students, attempted to be modelled on the *guru-griha-vāsa* system.
14. Blind Boys' Academy & Centre for the Visually Handicapped: offering general education as well as training in music, agriculture, and several other crafts to the blind and visually handicapped boys.
15. Computer Training Centres: imparting computer education and training to school and college students.
16. Rural Development/Social Workers' Training Institutes: imparting education for rural development work.
17. Social Welfare & Integrated Rural Development Institutes: conducting research and evaluation studies, and integrated rural development projects, apart from giving training courses.
18. Non-formal Education Centres: imparting literacy and adult education.
19. A deemed university.

A few lakhs of students (children, men, and women) are being benefited every year through a few thousand institutions belonging to the abovementioned categories. The fundamental inspiration behind all of them is the educational vision of Swamiji. It is not our aim in this paper to present statistics, which can be found in the Annual General Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. We would rather try to show:

- How attempts are being made to actualize Swamiji's educational ideas and ideals through these institutions, and
- How the animating spirit and the struggles of the pioneers of these projects (which include Swamiji's brother disciples, their disciples and followers) form the sustaining force behind these institutions.

One of the fundamental characteristics of the Ramakrishna Mission institutions imparting education, which in fact forms the very backbone of these institutions, is the active involvement and dedicated service of a large number of *tyāgis* — the monks of the Mission. A large contingent of sannyāsins and brahmachārins are actively engaged in imparting *aparā-vidyā*, the so-called secular education, and also education in true spirituality. This can be understood and appreciated only in the light of the above discussion on the unification of *parā* and *aparā-vidyā*, which is an integral approach to education, and by realizing the vital importance of the personal influence of the teacher's life on the taught and the role of *tyāgis* in imparting knowledge.

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar

Apart from Swamiji, the trendsetters in this regard among the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were Swami Ramakrishnananda (founder of the Students' Home in Madras) and Swami Turiyananda (inspirer of the Vidyapith project at Deoghar). It should be remembered that Swami Turiyananada was a traditional Vedantic sannyāsin, eager to shy away from the world of duality into the inner realm of the Non-dual Spirit. He would rather remain absorbed in contemplation than throw away the precious inner resources in outgoing actions. When Swamiji tried earnestly to cajole his beloved 'Haribhai' (Swami Turiyananda) into some active ministration, initially the latter would have none of it. Finally, it was Swamiji's tears that worked rather than his logic or philosophy. It is therefore a matter of great interest and inspiration to note this lion of Vedantic wisdom eager to start a concrete educational programme. Swami Gambhirananda records in his *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* that 'his [Swami Turiyananda's] fiery words caught the imagination of many, and most of all of Swami Sadbhavananda, then Brahmachāri Vidyachaitanya, who, along with his friend Jnaneswarananda, planned

to start a residential school.' They had no money. Their only assets were enthusiasm, the message of Swami Vivekananda, and the belief in national self-assertion. And to help them with advice on educational matters, and also with a band of self-sacrificing young men, there was Swami Nirvedananda, the Founder-Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Calcutta. Thus the idealism of the one and the executive ability of the other combined to give birth to the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith. It was first started in May 1922 at Mihijam (now Chittaranjan) and later shifted in the following January to Deoghar or Vaidyanath Dham, the famous pilgrim town. This institution is 'typical of the way in which institutions sprang up in the wake of national upheaval.' This is one of the earliest of the institutions meant to actualize Swamiji's concept of *guru-griha-vāsa*, with *tyāgis* in charge of imparting life-giving education for character-building and man-making.

Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Madras

Another institution of a similar nature, which too had its birth about the same time, was the residential High School section of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home at Madras. This Home, in itself, is one glorious example of the early attempts made by Swamiji's brother disciples to actualize his vision of *guru-griha-vāsa*. The Madras Students' Home is a unique institution which seeks to realize a large number of Swamiji's educational concepts. Character-building attempts form the keynote, for which the *guru-griha-ashrama* environment is preserved to a large extent by the *tyāgis*, thanks to the South Indian orthodoxy. These *tyāgis*, comprising monks and highly dedicated devotees of the Mission, constantly exert an unconscious influence on the boys residing with them. As a valuable means of acquiring knowledge, the *antevāsins* (residential students) are taught concentration of mind through silent prayer, contemplation, and chanting of Vedic and other hymns. Apart from acquiring mere theoretical knowledge, the boys are trained to do almost all the work of the Home themselves — from sanitation and campus-cleaning to worship. Furthermore, the technical institute attached to the Home trains the boys in various branches of engineering and technology at the diploma level. By teaching the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and Swamiji's Works, the spirit of true religion or spirituality is inculcated in the boys. By making them participate

in the Mission's philanthropic activities like relief work and free coaching of poor boys, etc., the idea that education should be productive of human welfare gets implanted in their young minds. The Home was started by Swami Ramakrishnananda, whom Swamiji called the 'Mother of the Math' in praise of his chief passion for the performance of duties pertaining to the Math and Sri Ramakrishna's worship and service. His chief lieutenant in this project was C. Ramaswamy Iyengar (whom he lovingly called Ramu). Ramu was dedication and unselfishness personified. Another of his unforgettable companion in shaping the Students' Home project was C. Ramanujachariar (Ramanuju for short), a cousin of Ramu. On Ramanuju fell the mantle of becoming the Secretary when Ramu passed away in 1932. Ramu-Ramanuju were the twin souls fortunate to receive the transforming touch of Swami Ramakrishnananda's personality in their dedicated service to the Students' Home. The blessings of Shashi Maharaj (as Swami Ramakrishnananada used to be called) were enough to fill the heart of Ramu with tremendous zeal and an 'impelling power', as he himself wrote later. He got the Home formally dedicated by Shashi Maharaj on 17 February 1905, which then housed seven poor, destitute boys. However, the institution in its present form came into existence much later — in 1921. After the dedication ceremony and worship of Sri Guru Maharaj's picture, Shashi Maharaj spoke the following memorable words, which epitomize Swamiji's message for our institutions:

> *Anna-dānam* is spoken of as a *mahā-dānam* and is considered very sacred in our country. And *vidyā-dānam* is greater. But the greatest is the conferring of spiritual knowledge (*jñāna-dānam*). The harmonizing of all the three should be the aim of this Institution. May Sri Ramakrishna bless the undertaking with success.

Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, sought to fulfil in a humble way Swamiji's cherished desire — the combination of the moral and spiritual disciplines of the Sanatana Dharma, the ancient religion of our country, with the advanced intellectual power and practical wisdom acquired through Western education, particularly its science and technology. He provided, as it were, the finishing touch to the shaping of the Students' Home. Shashi Maharaj used to say that whatever Swami Brahmananda touched not

Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Madras

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapitha, Deoghar

Veda Vidyalaya, Belur Math, where children are taught Sanskrit, the Vedas and Vedic chanting

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta

Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education (RIMSE), Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore

Visually handicapped (blind) boys reading Braille books at Blind Boys' Academy, Narendrapur, Calcutta

only became pure, but also got purifying power. His towering spiritual personality infused fresh life and vigour in the Home.

In 1918 he laid the foundation of the new building of the Home, where it now stands. Later he declared it open on the sacred day of Akshaya Tritiya in 1921. He had chosen this day for the inauguration because Akshaya means 'inexhaustible', and any work begun on that day would flourish with inexhaustible resources and strength. Swami Brahmananda's chief contribution to the growth of the Mission and its institutions (and the Home was no exception) was the creation of a rarefied and permanent spiritual atmosphere in them. This drew the dedicated workers, monastic and lay, into a current of purity and unselfishness as if by an unconscious power. On that memorable day of the opening ceremony, an eye-witness account by Ramaswamy Iyengar says that Swami Brahmananda stood meditating for some time to invoke the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna before entering the new building. He then entered by setting his right foot first across the threshold, when flowers were showered upon him and all around. Then he performed the *abhishekam* and initiated the worship of Sri Guru Maharaj. Soon after, he went into samādhi and remained still in that exalted mood of God-consciousness for a long time. Through that he transmitted to the institution spiritual influence and power to sustain it for ages. He stayed in the new premises of the Home for over a month in order to charge it with the spiritual power needed for the years to come. Ramu writes: 'He created in the Home an atmosphere of love, gentleness, peace and spiritual fervour, which one feels palpably even today.'

Institutions, we should remember, are not just brick and mortar, nor are they just sophisticated infrastructure — the modern telephones and fax machines, computers, e-mail, and the internet. They are sustained by purity and unselfishness, and intellectual, moral, and spiritual power. Amidst the maddening pace of quantitative expansion of institutions in the present day, it behoves us to reverentially meditate on the beaming countenance of Swami Brahmananda standing in samādhi at the opening ceremony of the Madras Students' Home, and on the soul-stirring, purifying, and penetrating spiritual atmosphere he created there for the benefit of the future generations. It is the collective responsibility of all of us not only to draw from, but also to sustain and contribute to, however little we can, this atmosphere of purity, morality, and spiritual power. Without this, the Mission's institutions would run a great

risk of degenerating into well-furnished and well-maintained store-houses of sophisticated, ultra-modern infrastructure. Let us all beware of this danger and pay heed to the following words of caution uttered by Swami Brahmananda at the inaugural ceremony of the Home in Madras in 1921:

> Through the grace of Sri Guru Maharaj a palace has been built for the poor, and great is your responsibility now. You must ever be on your guard lest luxury or ease or a sense of self-sufficiency should creep into it, for they will tarnish the ideals for which the Home stands.

The Students' Home in Madras, after becoming a force in itself, and after getting a full-fledged technical wing attached to it, addressed itself to the task of starting day schools of various grades. Although this is chronologically a much later development, occuring in history around 1932, we mention it at this point to show how the small seed sown by Swami Ramakrishnananda had by this time grown into a gigantic banyan tree — much like what Sri Ramakrishna had wanted Swamiji to become. Such is the enormous creative power of *bhakti*, of which we hear in Mahavir Hanuman's exploits in the *Ramayana*. This group of schools gradually attained such a magnitude that for their efficient management they had to be consitituted into a separate Mission centre in 1948. At present this centre is called the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, having three higher secondary schools and three primary schools, including an English medium school.

The Students' Homes at Bangalore and Calcutta

Another institution which bears the stamp of Swami Ramakrishnananda's inspiration is the one at Bangalore. Essentially it is a Math centre catering to the spiritual and cultural needs of the people. However, it also has a hostel for college boys, and a Vivekananda Balak Sangha and Yuvak Sangha giving sound theoretical and practical instructions to boys and youths in the spiritual and cultural heritage of India.

An institution similar to the Students' Home in Madras was started in Calcutta. Begun initially in a rented house to provide coaching to the students, it gradually developed into an Ashrama. Later it got affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission in the year 1919 with the blessings of the direct disciples of

Sri Ramakrishna — Swamis Brahmananda, Shivananda, Premananda, Turiyananda, and Saradananda. It was popularly known as the Calcutta Students' Home, to distinguish it from its counterpart at Madras. The guiding spirit behind the Calcutta Students' Home was Swami Nirvedananda, a brilliant scholar and teacher, and an educationist of original thinking.

We now see Swamiji's direct disciples becoming actively interested and enthusiastic about actualizing his vision. They were becoming more and more convinced that it was to fulfil Sri Ramakrishna's divine command that Swamiji struggled all his life. The silent but overwhelming presence and inspiration of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi along with the commanding and awe-inspiring spiritual leadership of Swami Brahmananda as the President, time and again reaffirmed to doubting minds the fundamental belief and conviction that the service rendered by the Mission in the name of Sri Ramakrishna to suffering humanity was the veritable worship of God. Swami Turiyananda's being initiated into active work by Swamiji's loving persuasion has already been referred to. Another brother disciple of Swamiji who could not appreciate, in the early stages, Swamiji's vision, but who, in the end, spoke fire while exhorting young monks of the Mission to give up their lives in trying to actualize Swamiji's vision, was Swami Premananda. As an example, we quote below from one of Swami Premananda's letters written to a devotee on 20 February 1917:

> Establishing schools, spread of education, gift of *vidyā* and *jñāna* were the cherished desires of Swamiji. Try to accomplish these tasks as much as possible. Those fortunate souls who participate in this sacred work are gods on earth, though living in human bodies. They alone are selfless workers, their lives alone are meaningfully lived, they alone are blessed on this earth.... Believing in the power of the Lord's blessed name, establish schools and educational institutions in each city, in each village, nay, in each locality, all over the country.

His work, more in line with that of Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda, was to mould the character of the workers and tune their minds to a high pitch of purity, dedication, unselfishness and devotion, which when done, ensured that the work would automatically follow as a logical consequence and in mathematical precision.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachi

Another brother disciple of Swamiji was Swami Akhandananda. He was such a faithful lieutenant of Swamiji that his pioneering efforts in this direction hardly need be wondered at. His work started even while Swamiji was alive. He felt an irresistible urge to start an orphanage in the remote Sargachi village of Murshidabad district in West Bengal. This work was an offshoot of the famine relief work he was doing at Mahula in the same district. He started this with the blessings of Swamiji in the middle of 1897. It proved to be a glorious example of how love of God could be transformed into love for human beings, both high and low, learned and ignorant, rich and poor. Swami Akhandananda's mind at that time was tuned to such a high pitch that whenever he saw any destitute, orphaned child suffering helplessly on the streets, he would pick it up and bring it to the newly started orphanage. While bathing the child with soap and warm water, he would chant the famous *Puruṣa–sūktam* hymn of the Vedas, which is usually chanted at the time of bathing the Deity in the form of a Narayana–shila. While so doing, he would remain absorbed in a divine mood resulting from loving contemplation and worship of God. Here was for him the living God, the living Deity in human form, in flesh and blood, gracefully accepting his worship! In January 1899 he started educational activities for the general public in the form of a free school for literacy and non-formal education, which also included, as Swamiji wanted, vocational training for boys in weaving and carpentry to enable them stand on their own feet. Swami Akhandananda himself used to participate in weaving to encourage the villagers become self-dependent with regard to their own clothing.

Sister Nivedita Girls' School, Calcutta

Another pioneering work, this time in connection with the education of women, about which Swamiji spoke and wrote so much, was by Sister Nivedita. Nivedita had the unique privilege of receiving the blessings of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and of almost all the direct disciples of the Master. Furthermore, Swamiji himself specially trained her with great care and strictness for the task of working for the welfare of Indian women. The loving mercilessness with which Swamiji educated and trained her is a unique story in the history

of spirituality and service. Through 'blood, toil, tears and sweat', he was chastening, shaping, and equipping her for the unique task which she alone could take up. At the end of this arduous training, Swamiji dedicated her to the service of God and Mother India, thus transforming his Margot into 'Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda', as she would joyfully call herself.

The Holy Mother sanctified both Belur Math and Nivedita's Girls' School on the eve of Kali Puja, i.e. 12 November 1898. Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, and Saradananda also were present on that day at the public meeting held at Baghbazar in connection with the inauguration of the school. At the end of Master's worship, which the Holy Mother herself performed, she prayed that 'the blessings of the Great Mother of the universe might be upon the school and that the girls trained there be ideal girls.' And of this blessing, Sister Nivedita later wrote: 'I cannot imagine a grander omen than her blessing, spoken over the educated Hindu womanhood of the future.' This marked the beginning of Sister Nivedita's work for the education of Indian women. Swamiji was constantly inspiring his disciple, the Dedicated One, 'to make some educational discovery, which would be qualitatively true and universally acceptable to the work of the modern education of Indian women.' He blessed her that she should be filled with not only faith, but also with the burning enthusiasm she needed. Swamiji wanted her to become a consuming energy in the cause.

After working in the institution on an experimental basis with a small number of girls, Sister Nivedita felt convinced that the venture should expand into a bigger and more permanent scheme. To collect the funds needed for this expansion, she sailed for the West with Swamiji. After returning in the beginning of 1902, she resumed her school work with fresh vigour at the Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar, Calcutta. Sister Christine, one of the most beloved and devoted disciples of Swamiji, joined hands with Nivedita. Beginning as a children's school with fifty girls in the first year, it was soon converted into a combined school admitting also the adult women of the locality, who came to learn reading, writing, and needle-work, etc. The *History of the Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission* records:

> The school had a high idealism both in the academic and spiritual sense, and it had a social value, since it aimed at training Indian women to take up

their own education themselves, thus ensuring independence of action and development on national lines.

Sudhira Bose, sister of Swami Prajnananda, took charge of the school after Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine. She opened an ashrama division called Matri Mandir — a boarding school for the dedicated women workers of the school. It was blessed by the visit and stay of the Holy Mother and the good wishes of Swami Saradananda. The institution was formally affiliated to the Mission in 1918. This was the first institution started and managed entirely by women from its very inception untill Sister Sudhira's death. It was a remarkable achievement in those days of conservatism and orthodoxy. Swamiji's dictate that the problems of women should be solved by women themselves by providing them with proper education and practical training found concrete expression in this institution. 'Hands off!' were Swamiji's words of caution to men eager to arrogate to themselves the role of self-appointed troubleshooters in regard to women's problems. The Sister Nivedita Girls' School was handed over to Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in 1963.

Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Vidyalaya, Madras

Another institution for women, having a history similar to that of the Sister Nivedita Girls' School of Calcutta, is the Sarada Vidyalaya of Madras. With just four inmates under the care of Sister Subbalakshmi and her aunt Valambal Ammal, both child widows, it had a humble beginning in 1912 in a small 'Home' for child widows at Egmore, Madras. The Sarada Ladies' Union, started by the Sister in the same year, inaugurated the Vidyalaya with twelve widows in a rented house at Triplicane in 1927. These girls received primary school teacher's training and were enabled to stand on their own feet. The school grew steadily, and in 1938 the Mission took charge of the Vidyalaya at the request of Sister Subbalakshmi, amalgamating the then existing schools for girls in different parts of the city of Madras. The Sarada Vidyalaya is now the pride of Madras in the sphere of education for girls. It has two higher secondary schools with more than 5000 students, a middle school, a primary school, a pre-basic school, two hostels, and two libraries. As envisaged by Swamiji, it provides a high standard of education in modern subjects, along with moral and religious education.

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore

Another educational complex that came into existence at the time of the national upheaval kindled by Mahatma Gandhi was the one at Perianaickenpalayam, Coimbatore. The moving spirit behind the creation of this complex was T. S. Avinashilingam, a devoted disciple of Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivananda). He was also greatly influenced by the nationalistic ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, who, he believed, was a channel of Swamiji's power. In 1930, at Coimbatore he started a Vidyalaya, then a boarding home for just three boys. In leaps and bounds it grew into a full-fledged residential school, which was affiliated to the Mission in 1934. Presently this institution is an enormous complex comprising a residential high school (in which integrated education is provided also to some blind boys along with others), a secondary grade teachers' training institute, a higher secondary school, a senior basic school, an autonomous teachers' training institute offering B.Ed., M.Ed., M.Phil., and Ph.D. courses in education and having a resource and development centre for the visually handicapped, an autonomous arts and science degree college, a college of physical education, an autonomous polytechnic, a school of agriculture, an industrial institute offering diploma courses, an industrial section imparting practical training to engineering students, and a library with an open access system containing more than a lakh of books and nearly 300 journals. The number of boys studying the various courses in this complex is more than 4000. In 2005, it celebrated its platinum jubilee. It has also been chosen by the Mission's new-born deemed University (RKMVERI) to act as its Specialized Faculty Centre. It would be focusing on the University's one of the major thrust areas of Disability Management and Special Education. This is just to give an idea of how sincerity and dedication can transform any endeavour, however small or humble, into a gigantic one.

In the early forties, three other similar institutions were started in West Bengal: Saradapitha at Belur, the Boys' Home at Rahara, and the Ashrama at Narendrapur. Each of them is now a huge educational complex, comprising a string of institutions. But more of this later. Let us now follow the chronology.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sarisha, West Bengal

We have mentioned how educational institutions sprang up in the wake of the national upheaval of the second decade of the twentieth century. In the second half of Swami Brahmananda's tenure as the President of the Ramakrishna Mission, the emphasis was on educational institutions. A few more of such institutions could be mentioned. One of them is the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama at Sarisha, West Bengal. Started in 1917 as a meeting-place for the religious-minded people and a centre for rendering service to the needy, it became almost defunct in 1920 after the death of its chief organiser. It was revived in 1921 by Swami Ganeshananda as a small centre for medical service and primary education. It has since then developed beyond recognition. This enthusiastic and energetic monk, bold and tender-hearted, with an indomitable will, stood against all rural prejudices to start a school for girls with all the modern facilities available at that time. It included physical exercise and training, and open-air activities unthinkable for girls in those times, particularly in a predominantly rural area. Although the Swami died prematurely in the middle of 1941, the school grew from strength to strength, and its contribution in the field of secondary education for both boys and girls has been immense.

Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur, Kerala

In the distant Malabar district in Kerala, at a place called Puranattukara near Thrissur, there sprang up, under the dynamic leadership of Swami Tyagishananda, an educational institution that catered mainly to the Harijan (depressed class) boys. The Ashrama had actually come into existence in 1915 under the name 'Vivekodaya Samajam'. A Gurukula or Students' Home and a Vidyamandira or day school were later added to it 1924. Affiliation to Belur Math was granted in 1929. Soon an industrial section and a night school were added. Gradually the residential section was divided into two parts — one for boys and the other for girls — and the school too grew in stature till it became a High School. Still later a library and a reading room were added to the Ashrama. These institutions at Puranattukara are greatly appreciated in Malabar for their high educational attainments and their contribution to Harijan uplift.

Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo, and Vivekananda Society, Jamshedpur

Two more large educational centres that came up during the twenties were at Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Jamshedpur (Tatangar). The *History of the Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission* states:

> The Ceylon Centre came to be organized under the Mission in 1924 by a process of coordination of diverse efforts conducted in different parts of the Island in the same line. Thus, with Colombo as the headquarters, where spiritual work too was carried on, there came to exist two schools in Trincomalee, two in Jaffna and five in Batticaloa, with a total strength of 1358 students on the rolls of all the five institutions by 1927.

The Vivekananda Society of Jamshedpur was originally started as a religious and philanthropic institution by some employees of Tata Iron and Steel Company. It was officially recognized by the Mission in 1927, and now it is a huge educational centre with several branch schools scattered over the entire city.

Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong, Meghalaya

Around the same period, a remarkable educational effort in an entirely different kind of setting in the remote Khasi and Jaintia Hills in Assam was set in motion, quietly and unostentatiously, by Swami Prabhananda (Ketaki Maharaj). In those days of British rule, most of the hill areas in Assam were sealed off from the plains. The denationalization and conversion of the poor and illiterate tribal people in the hill areas was going on en masse under the patronage of the alien British Government, with everyone helplessly looking on. At this critical juncture came Ketaki Maharaj's bold initiative to spread literacy among these tribal people and bring education along national lines, by national methods, to their doorsteps. A small beginning was made at Shella, near Shillong, with a primary school. It was soon upgraded to a middle English school. Other schools also grew up elsewhere in its wake. In 1929 a headquarters for all these institutions was established at Shillong, where Khasi boys could be accommodated for higher education. Although these efforts were like a drop in the ocean compared to the vast organized force of the foreign

missionaries, it still succeeded in rousing in the Khasis faith in themselves and in bringing them in touch with the glorious cultural and spiritual heritage of our own country, as visualized by Swamiji. In February 2000, Shella, which is now a sub-centre of Cherrapunji Ashrama, celebrated its platinum jubilee.

Ramakrishna Mission's Educational Work in Bangladesh

The Mission's educational work in Bangladesh, in places like Dhaka, Barisal, Sylhet, Habiganj, etc. deserves brief mention at this stage. The struggles of the pioneers at these places are now history, about which the present generation has little knowledge. Fortunately for us, some of the initial struggles in these places have been recorded by Swami Prabhananda (Varun Maharaj), presently a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Mission, who is well known for his thoroughly documented studies and research in the Mission's history. The present reference is to his article in the Saradiya number (1996) of the journal *Samaj Siksha* published by the Lokasiksha Parishad of the Narendrapur Mission.

Habiganj is a small town in the Sylhet district, by the side of a small river called Khoyai. On the other side of this river is a village called Gosainnagar. There were a large number of cobbler families in this village. They were extremely poor. To boot, they were also lazy and averse to any hard labour. They eked out a meagre living by collecting cow and buffalo-skins from slaughter houses and selling them to the Muslim businessmen. Although belonging to the cobbler-caste, they did not know shoe-making, nor did they have any tools or instruments for that purpose. They were looked upon with great contempt by both the Hindu and Muslim communities on account of their illiteracy, superstition, and uncivilized way of life. When Gauri-Ma, a saintly woman-disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, visited Habiganj in 1914, she granted a few devotees *mantra-diksha*. Inspired by her, many devotees then started a Sri Ramakrishna Seva Samity at Habiganj.

Even before the Samity was started, some of the educated youths of Habiganj village had begun service activities for the illiterate cobbler folk. In this the pioneer was Sri Yogesh Chandra Datta, who later became Swami Asokananda and headed the Mission's Northern California Centre for a long time. He was then highly respected for his intellectual and spiritual attainments.

This band of dedicated young men started a literacy campaign in the village with a night school. With the help of a lantern they used to go from house to house in that cobbler colony and literally catch hold of the slum children and bring them to school to study. From Habiganj, these young men used to cross the river to go to Gosainnagar village in the evenings to conduct their coaching classes. When the boat service used to be suspended during the rainy season on account of flood-tides, these young men would swim across the river. In later days, the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission used to do the same.

The workers of the Seva Samiti kept the night school going in spite of all odds. After some time, they felt that the helpless, illiterate cobbler-folk need to be helped with food and clothing too along with primary education. Mixing with them intimately and listening to their tales of woe, they first persuaded them to give up their surname of 'Cobbler' and assume, instead, the surname 'Rishi'. This was in tune with Swamiji's idea of giving back the masses their 'lost individuality'. Health and hygiene education and necessary arrangements for clean living were also initiated. Along with this, they took care to see that professional training in cobbler skills was imparted to them in a scientific manner.

The founder-Secretary of the Seva Samiti, Tarak Chakravarty, joined the Ramakrishna Mission to become a monk. He was initiated into sannyāsa and received his new name Swami Gopeswarananda. Later he became popularly known as 'Gopeswar Maharaj'. Very soon the Habiganj Seva Samiti got affiliated to Belur Math as a branch of the Mission, and Gopeswar Maharaj took charge of this centre as its first Head. He started various schemes for the all-round welfare of these villagers and taught them to be self-reliant. Many of these 'trained' cobblers went over to places like Sylhet, Karimganj, Silchar, etc. and earned their living by using their acquired expertise. Gopeswar Maharaj was ably assisted by one Barada Chakravarty, who later became Swami Sukhadananda and headed the Mission's Sargachi Centre for a long time. Also there was Debendra Das, who later became Swami Saumyananda and the Head of the Shillong Centre. Gopeswar Maharaj started a Cooperative Society for the cobblers and made it a rule that only literates would be admitted as its members. On account of this rule, there was a great demand for more night schools and the literacy rate increased in leaps and bounds. Seeing the great progress made by the Habiganj cobbler community, soon vocational training, centring round

the night school, was organized also in the neighbouring villages of Charinou, Uchayil and others. Thus, the individual and collective lives of these simple village folk were metamorphosed by the honest and sincere efforts of these monks.

Ramakrishna Mission's Pioneering Work among the Harijans of Kerala

Swamiji had seen how the upper castes, particularly the brahmins, had monopolized knowledge by denying it to the lower castes, whom they despicably termed shūdras and chandālās. This oppression of the lower castes by the egotistic brahmin scholars was practised in its most ugly form in some parts of South India. Pathetically the lower castes had been made to believe through centuries of oppression, neglect and hate that they had been born only to remain in an abject state of near-animality, that the Vedic and Upaniṣadic culture, and Sanskrit education were not for them! The savage inhumanity of organized priest-craft went to such an extent that these lower caste folk were made to feel that their very shadow would pollute the upper caste brahmins, for which they would do well to tie a bell to their ear to announce their approach while walking along the streets! Irony can go no further. In such a background, two exemplary attempts at all-round uplift of these unfortunate people were made by Swami Tyagishananda and Swami Nrisimhananda in Kerala.

Swami Tyagishananda began his educational service by starting a school named 'Vivekodayam School' in Thrissur town in 1915, even before he joined the Ramakrishna Order. In 1927 the school was shifted to a rural area called Puranattukara, about seven kilometres from Thrissur, mainly with the idea of serving the Harijan children of the place. It was affiliated to Belur Math in 1929. Two separate hostels, one for boys and another for girls were also started. The majority of inmates of the hostels were Harijan children. Tyagishananda was an erudite scholar but led a very simple and austere life. In 1934 Mahatma Gandhi visited the place and laid the foundation for the hostel and temple. In 1935 Tyagishananda left Thrissur to take charge of Bangalore Ashrama. The work for Harijans started by him is still being continued by the Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur, which has undergone much expansion in later years. It may also be mentioned here that in 1948 a new hostel and school for girls were

started in a nearby campus, which was later affiliated to Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar.

Swami Nrisimhananda's work began with a group of just four boys belonging to a Harijan family living in abject poverty. Along with literacy, he gave them vocational training so that they could earn their living and stand on their own feet. In two villages — Noornad and Adur — he carried on his work among the Harijans for nearly 45 years. The lepers, whom he had served with heartfelt devotion, made an earnest appeal to the Mission that, on his passing away, a small portion of his ashes should be sent to them to be preserved and worshipped as a holy relic. Such was the deep reverence and gratitude that these Harijan lepers bore towards this monk who was the nearest kith and kin of those whom society had condemend as untouchable wretches!

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur

The work of the Mission among the Harijans living in the slums of Rambagan in North Calcutta is a revolution in the concept of integrated slum development and is an internationally recognized model for such projects. This work is now being carried on under the banner of the Vivekananda Social Welfare Centre, which is a part of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, West Bengal. This Ashrama is the product of the pioneering work and master-vision of Swami Lokeswarananda, who was one of the eminent educationists of the Mission. He was ably assisted by several of his brother monks and also lay devotees, among whom Sri Shiv Shankar Chakraborty deserves special mention. Started in 1943 in Calcutta and later shifted to Narendrapur, this huge educational complex, similar to the one at Coimbatore which we have already mentioned, is the pride of independent India. This complex now comprises a residential degree college, a residential secondary school (considered by the Government of India as a model school), a primary school, the Institute for Social Welfare and Integrated Rural Development called the Lokasiksha Parishad, the Vivekananda Social Welfare Centre, the residential Blind Boys' Academy, and a department of technical and vocational education with the following units: a junior technical school, a school of automobile engineering, a commercial institute, and a motor mechanic training institute. Above all, the Lokasiksha Parishad is today functioning as one of the Specialized

Faculty Centres of the Mission's incipient deemed University. It will focus on the University's one of the major thrust areas of integrated rural development, including tribal development.

As we are discussing about the educational activities run by the Mission, it is pertinent to mention two more of such institutions in West Bengal: the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha at Belur, and the Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home at Rahara.

Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Calcutta

The Saradapitha was started in 1941, with Vidyamandira, a degree college, as its nucleus. The name 'Vidyamandira' owes its origin to an utterance of Swami Vivekananda. In 1898, soon after his triumphal return from the West, Swamiji told one of his disciples in the course of an inspired talk:

> Yonder plot of land on the south side of the [Belur] Math will be the centre of learning, where grammar, philosophy, science, literature...and English will be taught. This Temple of Learning [Vidyamandira] will be fashioned after the Tols of old days.[5] But [he added] now we must lay their foundations on a broad basis, that is to say, we must introduce a good deal of change into it to suit the requirements of the times.[6]

Swamiji also prophesied that Belur Math would ultimately develop into a full-fledged university. He perhaps had the Buddhist universities like Nalanda and Taxila in his mind. The Vidyamandira was therefore conceived of by its Founder-Secretary Swami Vimuktananda as the nucleus of the future 'Vivekananda University'. We shall discuss the newly established university a little later. To continue the narration, the untiring endeavours of Swami Vimuktananda, who, as the Secretary, steered the Saradapitha from its inception in 1941 till his untimely death in 1966, should be specially remembered as the pioneering effort of the Ramakrishna Mission in the field of higher education. The Vidyamandira was fortunate to have Swami Tejasananda as its first Principal. His vivacity and dynamism at a time when a large dose of these qualities could hardly be expected were a great source of inspiration for the teachers and students who came in contact with him. The Saradapitha complex now comprises the following units: The Vidyamandira,

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math

Shilpamandira — a Polytechnic run by
Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur Math

Vivekananda Institute of Human Excellence, Hyderabad

Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara, Calcutta

A school run by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur

Swami Vivekananda's ancestral house, Calcutta, where Vivekananda Research Centre is housed

a residential three-year degree college with a higher secondary section; the Sikshanamandira, a residential teachers' training college; the Shilpamandira, a polytechnic running three-year diploma courses in civil, electrical and mechanical enginnering; the Community Polytechnic, imparting vocational training in various trades, with a computer centre attached to it; the Shilpayatana, having two sub-units, namely, a junior technical school (ITI) and a higher secondary vocational section; the Shilpavidyalaya, a technical institute giving vocational training courses in various trades; the Janasikshamandira, having non-formal education centres, a free library, a mobile library, and a vocational training unit; and the Samaj Sevak Sikshanamandira, a free residential institution for training youths in rural development work. Like the Lokasiksha Parishad of the Naredrapur centre, the Samaj Sevak Sikshanamandira will be one of the Specialized Faculty Centres under the Mission's newly established deemed University. It would focus on the University's one of the major thrust areas, i.e. integrated rural development, including tribal development.

Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara, Calcutta

The Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home at Rahara is another educational complex comparable to those at Coimbatore, Narendrapur, and Belur. Started in 1943 in Calcutta, it was subsequently shifted to Rahara in the 24-Parganas district of West Bengal. It is a complex with a difference — it caters essentially to orphans and destitute or very poor boys. Swami Punyananda was its Founder-Secretary. He, along with Swamis Lokeswarananda and Vimuktananda, formed a trio, zealously founding and developing educational complexes in West Bengal almost simultaneously, one competing healthily with the other in the passion to serve God in man. The Rahara Boys' Home now comprises the following units: an orphanage where general education and training in crafts are provided, a pre-basic (nursery) school, five sub-units of junior basic school, a junior high school, a degree college, a junior technical school with a higher secondary vocational institute, a vocational training unit, a rural librarianship training centre (residential), and a junior basic training institute (residential).

Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysore

Swami Sambhavananda's educational and cultural work in Mysore, in particular his master-plan of the Ramakrishna Vidyashala (a residential school), has been acclaimed as one of the outstanding efforts of its kind in free India. In accordance with Swamiji's conception, all the ingredients needed for making of a complete man — with head, hand, and heart developed to full bloom — are integrated in its curriculum. A similar institution was founded in West Bengal in Purulia district through the efforts and vision of Swami Hiranmayananda. The residential school at Purulia too aims at giving a comprehensive education to its boys.

In connection with the work of Swami Sambhavananda, we need also to mention about the Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education (RIMSE) started by him in Mysore. It is exclusively devoted to programmes imparting education and training to teacher-trainees as well as others interested in the cultural and spiritual heritage of India. RIMSE has been recognized by the Government of India as one of the pioneers in the sphere of value-based and value-oriented education, education for moral values, etc.. with a well-thought-out syllabus and curriculum. Like Coimbatore, Narendrapur, and Saradapitha, it will be a Specialized Faculty Centre of the Mission's deemed University. It would mainly focus on one of the major thrust areas, i.e. Indian spiritual and cultural heritage and value education.

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College, Madras

Our narration on the subject of higher education would be incomplete without mentioning the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College at Madras. Started by a group of lay devotees in 1946 just in the twilight of the British rule in India, it mainly imparts education 'on national lines, by national methods', as conceived by Swamiji, integrating modern science and English education with the ancient Vedic and Sanskrit education. Over the years, this college has grown enormously in size and in quality. A recent survey, conducted in 1997 by *India Today*, rated it to be one of the ten best colleges in the country, which is not a mean achievement. It imparts education at the graduate and post-graduate levels, and its departments of Chemistry, Econo-

mics, Philosophy, Botany, and Sanskrit have research scholars working for their Doctorate degrees.

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta

On the cultural side of the Mission's activities, a pride of place is occupied by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture at Gol Park, Calcutta. The pioneer of this project was Swami Nityaswarupananda, a monk of originality and vision. From its modest beginning in 1938, it has come a long way and has now grown into an important centre for learning and research, recognized as such by the University of Calcutta and the Indian Council for Social Science Research. It was created to actualize Swamiji's vision of combining the best elements of Eastern and Western cultures by making scholars of both the worlds come together in friendly exchange of views. It also seeks to educate the younger generation on the glorious spiritual and cultural heritage of India. Its fully computerized library, having nearly two lakhs of books and more than four-hundred periodicals and journals, is one of the richest and the most modern in India. It also has a school of languages in which are taught 14 languages, both Indian and foreign. The international scholars' house accommodates scholars from several countries, who come to India to study Indian culture and spirituality. There is a Research Wing on Indological Studies attached to the Institute. Seminars, symposia and lectures on various topics relating to culture, religion, and spirituality form the main fabric of the Institute's life. The number of such lectures is well over 300 in a year, which shows that they are almost a daily affair.

Mention may be made here of a similar school of languages in Hyderabad, attached to the Ramakrishna Math there, as well as of the propagation of Indian culture and spirituality that was being done through the lectures of Swami Ranganathananda, the thirteenth President of the Order, who was a gifted speaker of international repute. As one of the Vice-Presidents, he stayed at the Hyderabad Ashrama till 1999, in which year the mantle of Presidentship of the Order was passed on to him. Then onwards he stayed at Belur Math till his mahāsamādhi in 2005. During his stay at Hyderabad, his charismatic personality and presence drew thousands of people from all walks of life to the Hyderabad Ashrama. After his departure from there in 1999, the work of

propagating Indian culture and spirituality continued through a new institute — *Vivekananda Institute of Human Excellence.*

Vivekananda Institute of Human Excellence, Hyderabad

To counter the continuing erosion of moral and spiritual values in every sphere of life and activity, an urgent need was felt by the Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, for starting an institute that would impart, in accordance with Swamiji's plan, life-building, man-making, and nation-building education and training. With this aim the *Vivekananda Institute of Human Excellence* came into existence in the precincts of the Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, on 10 September 2000. It was inaugurated by Swami Ranganathananda, the then President of the Order.

The institute conducts various programmes to cater to the needs of a representative cross section of society like the youths, students, government employees, public sector undertakings, corporate bodies, and professionals like engineers, doctors, and others. Some of the major programmes are: Value orientation programmes for teachers, government employees, corporate employees and executives; educational motivation programmes for college students; confidence building courses; communication skills; art of self-improvement; meditation courses; personality development courses; courses to develop leadership qualities; special training for professionals like doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers and others; Vivekananda bālā-vikāsa programme; parents' motivation courses; special value orientation programmes for rural groups; training in classical, instrumental and devotional music; self-awareness programmes, etc.

Since the inception of this institute until this day (October 2005), more than two lakh candidates have been trained in different courses.

Ramakrishna Mission in the Area of Sanskrit Education

We have mentioned the Mission's educational work among the tribals and the Harijans. Educating the masses was one of Swamiji's pet ideas, and with him it was almost a passion. His aim in educating the masses was to bring the great spiritual ideas, the gems stored in our ancient books, within the

reach of the ordinary person, including the fisherman, the pariah, and the chandāla. His famous words were:

> These conceptions of the Vedanta must come out, must remain not only in the forest, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit, and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fishermen that are catching fish, and with the students that are studying.[7] In one word, I want to make them popular. I want to bring out these ideas and let them be the common property of all, of every man in India, whether he knows the Sanskrit language or not.[8]

The main obstacle in popularizing Vedanta, Swamiji felt, was the Sanskrit language, in which almost the entire ancient spiritual literature is written. To overcome this obstacle, Swamiji suggested that Vedantic ideas should be taught to the people in their own language, that is, in the vernacular. But then, he also emphasized the spread of Sanskrit education. He was bold enough to assert that:

> Even the great Buddha made one false step when he stopped the Sanskrit language from being studied by the masses.[9]

The result was that, though his great ideas spread quickly far and wide, the prestige was missing. 'Knowledge came, but the prestige was not there, culture was not there.'[10] This is very much like, for example, the study of science and technology in the English language. Spreading scientific and technical education in the vernaculars will perhaps make them spread faster and cover a wider area, but then the prestige will be lacking. For, in the modern world, particularly in the world of science and technology, English and prestige go together. So, along with the vernaculars, English should be equally emphasized in the modern context.

The Mission's work in the spread of Sanskrit education has been, unfortunately, very meagre, compared to its work in other educational spheres. Language and communication skills are areas to which enough attention has not been paid in a systematic way. The time has perhaps come when this aspect of educational work needs to be taken up with dead seriousness, for, with the growth of hi-tech devices like computers, the internet, and so on, the world has shrunk so much that today effective communication forms the bed rock of

success in any educational enterprise. Our younger generation is woefully lacking in this, and in-depth training in these skills is therefore urgent in the present age when Information Technology and Communications are the latest states-of-art. However, some work in imparting Sanskrit education is being done in Palai and Kalady, both in Kerala. No better place could be imagined for this work than Kerala, the birth place of the great Bhāshyakāra, Sri Shankaracharya. During his wandering days, it was in Kerala that Swamiji found, to his great surprise, women conversing fluently in Sanskrit.

Mission's Educational Work among the Indian Tribal Community

We have already mentioned the Mission's educational work for the tribal community as well as its activities among the Harijans and depressed sections of society. When Swami Vireswarananda took over as the President of the Math and the Mission in 1966, his priorities and passion were for the relief and rehabilitation of the suffering and distressed people on the one hand, and educational and medical service for the tribal and depressed people on the other. These were identified, during the Second Convention held in 1980, as some of the priority areas of work to be undertaken by the Mission:

> The Sangha has to be more and more active in rendering all possible help to the oppressed and ignorant masses...[as well as in] educating the women, rebuilding India, and regenerating the world on the basis of spirituality.[11]

Three prominent examples of tribal work initiated during this period, i.e. in and after 1966, are briefly described below, to illustrate the new thrust given to the Mission's work in the field of tribal uplift under the leadership of Swami Vireswarananda, the then President. We are, however, confining ourselves to the field of education only, which is our main topic of discussion. These three ventures in tribal uplift are spread over a vast area: in Arunachal Pradesh in the North-Eastern frontier; in Tripura at Viveknagar near Agartala; and in Chattisgarh at Narainpur, Bastar district. Reference has already been made to the earliest educational activities conducted in the 1920s by the Ramakrishna Mission among the tribal community in Meghalaya, the erstwhile Khasi-Jaintia Hill district of Assam. The main challenge in the process of

integrating these tribal people into the mainstream life has been to help them preserve their own beautiful tribal culture. On this point, Swami Gautamananda, who had worked there among the tribal people for a couple of decades, writes:

> We have in our epics and Purāṇas like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* mention of Guhaka (a tribal King), Uloopi, Chitrangada (Naga/Manipuri tribal princesses), and a Kirata tribe, and so on. These were gradually assimilated into the mainstream of Hinduism by the natural law of 'interaction, mutual appreciation, and selective or wholesale assimilation'. Thus the peaceful evolution of Indian tribes, and the assimilation of these tribes into the main culture, was going on since the Vedic times. It was only when the British colonialists interfered with this process by passing offensive laws like the Scheduled Tracts Act of 1874 etc., which forcibly segregated the tribal communities from the main society, that the tribal people were left lagging behind the main society in economics, education and culture.... A sort of decadent British culture had penetrated this State (Meghalaya) since 1840, thus practically destroying the beautiful tribal culture, their dances and dress-styles, and replacing their joyous ceremonies and festivities with a Welsh-Mission's dogmatic version of Christianity. To motivate such people against the foreign missionaries and towards an education which is liberal and science-and-technology oriented was an uphill task in the beginning. But as the Ramakrishna Mission's ideals of harmony of religions, divinity and dignity of each individual, and service of God in man spread slowly, the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes started flocking Ramakrishna Mission schools, which spread like mushrooms, especially in the South Meghalaya.

There is a cultural difference between the tribal people in Meghalaya and those in Arunachal Pradesh. Meghalaya tribal society, like its counterparts in Kerala and Manipur, is matriarchal in character. It is the woman who rules. She shoulders all the responsibilities which would normally be borne by a man in the plains. After marriage, the groom leaves his home for good to live with the bride. The daughter, and not the son, inherits the parents' property. The children take the surnames of the mother and not of the father.

During the 1960s, when the Ramakrishna Mission first took up educational and medical activities in the Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh (the northern

borders of which touch Tibet/China), the literacy rate there was almost nil. Furthermore, in contrast to the tribal people of Meghalaya, the Mynyong tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have a patriarchal society. A sort of polyandry also prevailed there. But one important characteristic common to all the tribal communities is their unsophisticated simplicity and absolute frankness in dealings. They would detect with uncanny intuition any sort of 'cleverness' or 'diplomatic tact' and detest it from the bottom of their hearts. They therefore had an innate sense of honesty. The Mission schools at Along and Narottam Nagar in Arunachal Pradesh have gone fairly a long way in raising the educational standards of these tribal people.

The story of the tribal people at Narainpur, in the Bastar district of Chattisgarh, is even more pathetic. This place was originally called Abujhmarh (literally meaning 'unknown land'). The tribal people in Abujhmarh did not even know how to cover their own bodies with clothes. Penetrating into this Abujhmarh, and creating the present Abujhmarh Tribal Service, a huge educational, cultural, and medical complex for tribal welfare and uplift, was a task meant only for bold and adventurous monks 'fired with the zeal of holiness and fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor, the fallen and the downtrodden.' The Abujhmarh project was fortunate in getting as its pioneer one such monk in Swami Atmananda, who was then the Secretary in charge of the Raipur Centre of the Ramakrishna Mission. Unfortunately, the cruel jaws of death snatched him away untimely, when this tribal project had just begun to grow. But he will be remembered as a friend of these poor tribals, one who boldly initiated this project and executed it with the efficiency and daring of an army general.

The Deemed University (RKMVERI)

Another institution, which is a major landmark in the Ramakrishna Mission's century-old movement in the field of education, is the deemed university known as the *Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute* (RKMVERI). Its genesis can be traced back to Swamiji's prophetic utterance, made just two days before his mahāsamādhi on 4 July 1902:

> The spiritual impact that has come to Belur [Math] will last fifteen hundred years, and it will be a great university. Do not think I imagine it; I see it.

Today, after more than a century, with the establishment of a deemed university a concrete step has been initiated towards realizing Swamiji's vision, marking a watershed in Ramakrishna Mission's educational programme. It was formally inaugurated on 4 July 2005. Swamiji perhaps had, as stated earlier, the Buddhist universities like Nalanda and Taxila in his mind. In accordance with his ideas, this university imparts man-making and character-building education by combining the best elements of both the Eastern and the Western worlds. It would provide opportunities for education and research in the disciplines of arts, sciences, and spiritual subjects. The supplementary and inter-dependent character of these three disciplines will receive special emphasis.

It is an international university that operates through the branch-centres of Ramakrishna Mission in India and abroad. It is not a single institution located in a particular campus. It is rather a cluster of institutions, all of them belonging to the branches of Ramakrishna Mission with its headquarters at Belur Math. In this sense, this is a university with a difference — a unique experiment of its kind in India. It has four major thrust areas in which it operates. These areas are not usually covered or emphasized by other universities in India. They are:

1. Disability management and special education
2. Integrated rural development including tribal development
3. Indian cultural and spiritual heritage and value education
4. Disaster management including relief and rehabilitation

These areas are the major faculties of this university. Some of the branch-centres functioning efficiently in these areas are its Specialized Faculty Centres. For instance, the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, is the Specialized Faculty Centre for the first thrust area mentioned above. Similar is the case with the other areas.

The first and foremost requirement of any country is educated men and women of impeccable character, with head, hand, and heart harmoniously

developed, rather than mere knowledgeable and skilful engineers and doctors lacking in feeling and dedication. Such men and women, endowed with brilliant intellects, loving hearts, and efficient hands, educated in a new ethos of self-abandonment rather than self-aggrandizement, can resuscitate our country to her past glory, and through that effect the complete regeneration of humankind. This was Swamiji's one of the cherished visions. It is to this end that this university is dedicated. This nascent university has thus silently set in motion a new movement. It aims at nothing short of an all-round development of humankind, which time alone will prove. Swamiji had prophesied:

> The power that will have its rise from here [Belur Math] will flood the whole world and turn the course of men's lives into different channels...

To be sure, through this university, a promising step has been taken towards fulfilling Swamiji's millennium vision of flooding the globe with the light of education, universal harmony, and peace.

Vivekananda Research Centre

Swamiji wanted science and religion, poetry and philosophy, hitherto considered incompatible, to shake hands. He wanted a blending of the scientific temper and religious faith. The Board of Management of the new university therefore has started *Vivekananda School of Fundamental Science and Philosophy*, under which there would be a *Vivekananda Research Centre*, which will undertake research in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda philosophy, consciousness studies, fundamental sciences like theoretical physics, computer science, and pure mathematics. It also was inaugurated on 4 July 2005. It presently operates from Swami Vivekananda's ancestral house in Calcutta, which became a new centre of the Order in October 2004.

We have now almost reached the end of our narration. Many more educational projects, big and small, which have grown in recent times into full-fledged branches of the Mission, have not been discussed here. An exhaustive list of centres of the Math and Mission doing educational work in some form or other, however small they may be, is given in the annexe to this paper.

Conclusion: An Appraising Glance on the Mission's Educational Work

The educational services rendered by the Math and the Mission, their *vidyā-dāna-yajña*, is going on and growing steadily in size. There is great public appreciation of the work. There is also a tremendous demand for more institutions, more schools, colleges, students' homes, hostels, and so on. This appreciaton and demand should make us all pause and reflect, and critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of the work. While there has been an enormous growth in quantity, has there been a corresponding and equal increase in quality? Is the Mission's work outstanding by contrast only, given the unprecedented all-round degradation in standards, or is it truly a shining representative of the great ideals set before us by Swamiji? Is a sense of complacency creeping into the Mission workers because of this 'shine-by-contrast', or are they deeply aware of the chasm — which can be bridged only by pure, unselfish work — between ideal and practice, the very high ideal set before the Mission by Swamiji and the actual ground reality of how far they have been able to put it into practice?

The hundred years of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and its stepping into the 21st century, is a time not only for rejoicing, but for deep reflection and self-analysis. How far have the Math and the Mission been able to actualize the educational vision of Swamiji? How far have they been able to adapt themselves to the changing times, while remaining uncompromising in their ideological struggle? Just as a tree has to be judged by its best fruit, even so, the strength of a chain is in its weakest link. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Mission's attempts to realize the ideals that Swamiji set before it a hundred years ago? In short, would Swamiji be happy, if he were with us today in flesh and blood, to see the Math and the Mission going and growing in the way that it is? Are these twin organizations caught up in a rut of routine, in the glamour of examination results, in the repetitive exercises which every other institution does? Would their performance satisfy the soul of Swamiji who always wanted to cut across traditional lines and mediocrity and blaze new trails in the unexplored horizons of human excellence?

These are the few questions that now and then agitate the minds of those involved in Swamiji's educational experiment. Their answers are not at all

easy to find. The answers can, however, come through reverential meditation and introspection, through uncompromising devotion to Truth, and a commitment to the higher ideals of moral and spiritual excellence. Above all, the answers can come through an earnest prayer to the Supreme Divinity that pervades everything, that stirs every heart, impels every mind, and awakens our intuition of the Indwelling Spirit, the Antaryāmin, who is of the nature of Infinite Existence, Infinite Awareness, and Infinite Joy.

References

1 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama], Vol. 5, pp. 29-30. Hereafter *Complete Works*.

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3 Ibid., p. 58.

4 Ibid., Vol. 4, p. 482.

5 Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 158.

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7 Ibid., Vol. 3, 245.

8 Ibid., p. 290.

9 Ibid., Vol. 3, 291.

10 Ibid.

11 Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission* [Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama], 3rd edn, pp. 335-36.

12 *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 157.

ANNEXE - I

Educational Institutions of Ramakrishna Math and Mission
(2003-2004)

Types of Institutions	No. of Units	No. of Students		
		Boys	Girls	Total
Degree colleges	6	8004	508	8512
Sanskrit college	1	28	—	28
Teachers' training colleges	5	745	7	752
Junior basic training institutes	5	382	155	537
Higher secondary schools	21	15,971	8033	24,004
Secondary schools	38	13,666	5110	18,776
Sanskrit schools	3	377	189	566
Schools of different grades	361	22,071	15,882	37,953
Polytechnics 4	1718	—	1718	
Junior technical & industrial schools	6	703	—	703
Hostels & Students' homes	119	14,324	2061	16,385
Orphanages	6	730	114	844
Institutes of agriculture	3	1029	—	1029
Schools of languages	2	45,415	34,975	80,390
Computer training centres	2	763	83	846
Centres for the disabled	2	221	48	269
Rural development training institutes	4	6538	2949	9487
Non-formal education centres etc.	270	9021	7758	16,779
TOTAL	858	1,41,706	77,872	2,19,578

ANNEXE – II

List of Educational Institutions of Ramakrishna Mission as in the year 2005

Sl. no.	Name of the Institution	Place	State (if in India)/ Country (if outside)	Nature of Activity	Year of Starting
1	Ramakrishna Math	Madras	Tamil Nadu	Girls' School/Primary School	1897
2	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Sargachi	West Bengal	School	1897
3	Ramakrishna Math & Mission	Dhaka	Bangladesh	School	1899
4	Vedanta Society of Northern California	San Fransisco	USA	Sunday School	1900
5	Ramakrishna Math	Bangalore	Karnataka	Hostel for College Boys	1903
6	Ramakrishna Mission	Barisal	Bangladesh	Students' Home	1904
7	Ramakrishna Math	Nattarampalli	Tamil Nadu	Primary School	1908
8	Ramakrishna Mission	Barisal	Bangladesh	Students' Home	1911
9	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Baranagore	West Bengal	School	1912
10	Ramakrishna Math & Mission Sevashrama	Contai	West Bengal	Students' Home	1913
11	Ramakrishna Mission	Dhaka	Bangladesh	Jr. High School, Vocational	1914
12	Ramakrishna Math & Mission Ashrama	Midnapore	West Bengal	School	1914
13	Ramakrishna Math & Mission Sevashrama	Tamluk	West Bengal	School	1914
14	Ramakrishna Math & Mission Sevashrama	Garbeta	West Bengal	School/Night Schools	1915
15	Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home	Belgharia	West Bengal	Students' Home	1916
16	Ramakrishna Ashrama & Mission Seva Samiti	Sylhet	Bangladesh	Students' Home	1916
17	Ramakrishna Ashrama	Thiruvananthapuram	Kerala	Nursing School	1916
18	Ramakrishna Math & Mission Seva Samiti	Karimganj	Assam	Students' Home	1917
19	Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home	Madras	Tamil Nadu	Students's Home	1918
20	Ramakrishna Math & Mission	Bhuvaneswar	Orissa	School/Students' Home (tribal boys)	1919
21	Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Society	Jamshedpur	Jharkhand	School	1920
22	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Kanpur	Uttar Pradesh	School	1920
23	Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Vidyalaya	Madras	Tamil Nadu	School	1921
24	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Faridpur	Bangladesh	Students' Home	1921
25	Ramakrishna Ashrama & Mission Seva Samiti	Habiganj	Bangladesh	Students' Home	1921
26	Ramakrishna Math	Jamtara	Jharkhand	Non-Formal Schools	1921
27	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Sarisha	West Bengal	School (boys/girls)	1921
28	Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith	Deoghar	Jharkhand	School	1922

Sl. no.	Name of the Institution	Place	State (if in India)/ Country (if outside)	Nature of Activity	Year of Starting
29	Ramakrishna Math	Hyderabad	Andhra Pradesh	School of Languages	1922
30	Ramakrishna Ashrama	Mymensingh	Bangladesh	Students' Home	1922
31	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Patna	Bihar	Students' Home	1922
32	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Dinajpur	Bangladesh	Students' Home	1923
33	Ramakrishna Mission	Bombay	Maharashtra	Vocational Training	1923
34	Ramakrishna Mission	Colombo	Sri Lanka	School/Orphanage	1924
35	Ramakrishna Math & Mission Ashrama	Malda	West Bengal	School	1924
36	Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama	Silchar	Assam	Home (for tribal boys)	1924
37	Ramakrishna Ashrama	Mysore	Karnataka	School	1925
38	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Asansol	West Bengal	School	1926
39	Ramakrishna Ashrama	Bagerhat	Bangladesh	Students' Home	1926
40	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Katihar	Bihar	School	1926
41	Ramakrishna Math	Palai	Kerala	Sanskrit School & College	1926
42	Ramakrishna Math	Rajkot	Gujarat	Students' Home	1927
43	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Ranchi	Jharkhand	Night School	1927
44	Ramakrishna Math	Thrissur	Kerala	School/Sanskrit Classes	1927
45	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Jalpaiguri	West Bengal	Students' Home	1928
46	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Manasadwip	West Bengal	School	1928
47	Ramakrishna Math	Nagpur	Maharashtra	Students' Home	1928
48	Vedanta Society	Providence	USA	Sunday School	1928
49	Ramakrishna Mission	Singapore	Singapore	School	1928
50	Ramakrishna Math	Thrissur	Kerala	School & Home (for Harijans)	1929
51	Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya	Coimbatore	Tamil Nadu	Educational Complex	1930
52	Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Sevashrama	Jayrambati	West Bengal	School	1930
53	Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama	Kozhikode	Kerala	School	1930
54	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Cherrapunji	Meghalaya	School	1931
55	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Taki	West Bengal	School	1931
56	Ramakrishna Mission Sevapratishthan	Calcutta	West Bengal	Nursing School, PG Medical College & Research School	1932
57	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Madras	Tamil Nadu	School	1932
58	Ramakrishna Math	Puri	Orissa	Non-Formal School	1932
59	Ramakrishna Mission	Chengalpattu	Tamil Nadu	School	1936

Sl. no.	Name of the Institution	Place	State (if in India)/ Country (if outside)	Nature of Activity	Year of Starting
60	Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama	Kalady	Kerala	School/Sanskrit School	1936
61	Ramakrishna Mission	Nadi	Fiji	High Schools	1937
62	Ramakrishna Mission	Shillong	Meghalaya	Home (for tribal boys)	1937
63	Ramakrishna Mission Institute Of Culture	Gol Park	West Bengal	School of Languages	1938
64	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Vishakhapatnam	Andhra Pradesh	School	1938
65	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Guwahati	Assam	Home (for tribal boys)	1939
66	Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha	Belur Math	West Bengal	Educational Complex	1941
67	Ramakrishna Mission	Vacoas	Mauritius	School	1941
68	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Narendrapur	West Bengal	Educational Complex	1943
69	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Puri	Orissa	Home (SC/ST Boys)	1944
70	Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home	Rahara	West Bengal	Educational Complex	1944
71	Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith	Madras	Tamil Nadu	College	1946
72	Ramakrishna Math & Mission	Kamarpukur	West Bengal	School	1947
73	Ramakrishna Math & Mission	Mangalore	Karnataka	Boys' Home, Sunday School	1947
74	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Ramharipur	West Bengal	School	1952
75	Ramakrishna Mission	Rajahmundry	Andhra Pradesh	Free Hindi Classes	1954
76	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Chandigarh	Haryana & Punjab	Home (for college boys)	1956
77	Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Ashrama	Raipur	Madhya Pradesh	Students' Home	1957
78	Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith	Purulia	West Bengal	School	1958
79	Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir	Khetri	Rajasthan	School & Vocational Training Centre	1959
80	Ramakrishna Mission	Port Blair	Andamans	Vocational School/Home	1961
81	Ramakrishna Mission	Along	Arunachal Pradesh	School (for tribal boys & girls)	1966
82	Ramakrishna Math & Mission	Viveknagar	Tripura	Educational Complex (tribal students)	1966
83	Ramakrishna Mission	Narottam Nagar	Arunachal Pradesh	School (for tribal students)	1971
84	Ramakrishna Math	Madurai	Tamil Nadu	Primary School	1975
85	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama	Narainpur, Bastar	Madhya Pradesh	School (for tribal students)	1985
86	Ramakrishna Mission	Shivanahalli	Karnataka	Jr. High School/Vocational training	1996
87	Ramakrishna Mission	Indore	Madhya Pradesh	School	1999
88	Ramakrishna Mission	Malliankaranai	Tamil Nadu	School/Orphanage	2000
89	Ramakrishna Math	Hyderabad	Andhra Pradesh	Institute of Human Excellence	2000
89	Ramakrishna Mission	Vijayawada	Andhra Pradesh	School	2001
90	RKMVERI	Belur Math	West Bengal	Deemed University	2005

Ramakrishna Mission in the Field of Medical Service

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

The Beginning of the Sevashrama Movement

JUNE 13, 1900. The day had not yet dawned. Jaminiranjan was winding his way through one of the narrow dingy lanes of Varanasi leading to the bathing ghat. A feeble groan caught his ear. Many had already passed that way, but no one had stopped to investigate. But Jaminiranjan did and found an old lady, ill and starved, lying on the roadside. As he approached her, she said feebly: 'I have not taken anything for four days, my son. Give me some food.' Jaminiranjan lifted the lady and laid her carefully on the verandah of the nearby house, rushed to the bathing ghat, and begged four annas from the first gentleman he met. He purchased some cooked food and fed the old lady and thus saved her life. Thus was sown the seed of dedicated service to God in the form of the poor and the suffering, which was to grow into a mighty banyan tree of a large institution that would render service to thousands of needy.

This old lady was one of the many religious persons who come to spend their last days in the holy city of Kashi — the *mukti kṣetra* — and who are reduced to a state of dire poverty and helplessness due to the ruthlessness of man and the irony of fate.

The First Sevashrama at Varanasi

After rendering this emergency help to her, Jaminiranjan went to his friends Haridas, Charuchandra (later Swami Shubhananda), Kedarnath (later

Swami Achalananda), and others, and gave them an account of what had happened. A band of young men with Charuchandra as the leader had already formed a study circle with the aim of realizing God in the light of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. They collected donations and managed to admit the lady to the hospital. The new group now decided upon future action: service to the poor, the needy, the destitute, and the sick. They organized themselves into an association and named it 'Home of Relief'. They searched for the needy on the roadside, in lanes and by-lanes, and arranged for their relief by sending some to the hospital, and giving food and clothing to others. A patient of typhoid fever was the first patient to be accommodated in Kedarnath's house and nursed by them. Soon the need for more spacious accommodation for patients was felt and a small house was rented for five rupees a month. A small out-patient homoeopathic dispensary was also started. One room was for hospital patients, and the dispensary was also the office and the bedroom of two full-time workers — Charuchandra and Jaminiranjan.

Soon the enthusiasm, dedication, and indefatigable labour of the young men attracted the attention and sympathy of prominent citizens, on whose advice the first general meeting of the association was held on 5 September 1900, at which it was renamed 'The Poor Men's Relief Association'. Within six months the hospital and out-patient relief work increased so much that a more spacious house at Dashaswamedha Road had to be rented, which was later shifted to a bigger house in Ramapura in 1901. Within eighteen months 330 men and 334 women received treatment.

In February 1902, when Swami Vivekananda visited Varanasi, he was highly pleased by the work done by the association. However, he advised them to change the name to 'Home of Service', for, as he said: 'Who are you to render relief? You can only serve. The pride of rendering relief leads to ruin... How arrogant it is on the part of a man to think another lower and humbler than himself? Service and not mercy should be your guiding principle — service to man, the image of God.' He turned to Charuchandra and said: 'Regard every pice collected for the poor as your life-blood. Such noble work can be carried on properly and permanently only by those who have renounced everything.' Swamiji wrote an appeal to the public on behalf of the Home of Service, which accompanied the first report of the Home in 1902. Swamiji also instructed Swami Brahmananda to keep a watch on the organization. With

the latter's approval and by a resolution of the managing committee of the Home of Service, the association was affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mission and came to be known by its present name, 'Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service', on 23 September 1903.

Things moved fast thereafter. Unexpected donations from two donors, and an equally unexpected offer of a plot of land for a paltry Rs. 6000/- enabled the Home to have a place of its own. Here Swami Brahmananda laid the foundation stone of the future building on 16 April 1908. Swami Vijnanananda was the chief architect, and the new building was inaugurated by Swami Brahmananda on 16 May 1910. The Holy Mother visited the Home of Service on 8 November 1912 and, having been taken round, was extremely delighted and exclaimed, 'Thakur himself lives here and Goddess Lakshmi has chosen this place as her abode.' The ten rupee currency note donated by her is still preserved in the Home as a sacred treasure and blessing.

The Kankhal Centre

Let us now review the events occurring almost simultaneously at Kankhal. Swami Vivekananda, who, from personal experience, knew the helpless condition of monks living at Hardwar and nearby places, told Swami Kalyanananda: 'My boy, can you do something for the ailing monks at Hardwar and Rishikesh? There is none to look after them when they fall ill. Go and serve them.' In June 1901 Kalyanananda began his work at Kankhal, a village near Hardwar. Two rooms were hired at Rs. 3/- per month, which served as his dispensary, hospital, bedroom, office, and everything. His stock of medicine was contained in a box. Living on alms, the Swami distributed medicines not only to those who came to him, but also to those who could not or would not stir out of their huts to visit them. He was soon joined by Swami Nischayananda, another disciple of Swami Vivekananda. Ignoring physical hardship, the two monks opened a dispensary at Rishikesh, which was like a branch centre fifteen miles from Kankhal, to serve the needy walking all the way to and fro every day.

Apart from treating monks in their huts, they would also perform the last rites of those monks who had died in their huts and had no one to perform these rites. They did not restrict their medical service to the monks only, but

extended it to the untouchables and the so-called outcastes. As a result, on the one hand they were castigated as untouchables — *bhangis* — by the majority of the orthodox monks of the towns of Rishikesh and Hardwar, and on the other, they were highly respected by others, of whom Mandaleswar Swami Dhanraj Giri was the foremost. Once it happened that at one *sādhu-bhanḍārā* — a feast for monks — hosted at one of the Maths, the 'out-casted monks', Kalyanananda and Nischayananda, were not invited. When Mandaleswar Dhanraj Giri, the chief guest, learnt this, he rebuked the orthodox monks and said that those two monks were truly practising the Vedantic tenets of 'all is Brahman', and unless they were invited and honoured he would not accept hospitality. This opened the eyes of the orthodox monks, and their antagonism towards the two monks soon vanished.

Their dedicated service soon attracted the attention of people and help started flowing in from various quarters. A plot of land was purchased in 1903 and the first building of two blocks, designed by Swami Vijnanananda, was constructed on it. The Sevashrama was shifted to its new premises in 1905. In 1911 another ward of twenty beds was added and a tuberculosis block was inaugurated in 1913. By the end of 1922 the number of beds had risen to 66.

It is needless to mention that the work of service was wholly free and was supported by charity and donations, which ranged from a meagre four annas to a thousand rupees or more. The monks sustained themselves by *mādhukari-bhikshā* — begging food from door to door. Two others, Swami Japananda and Brahmachāri Suren, also went for *bhikshā* and thus reduced the burden on the Sevashrama. However, there were practical difficulties involved in simultaneously begging and managing the affairs of the hospital. Realizing this, Swami Saradananda, the General Secretary of the Mission, intervened, and on his instruction in 1921, the tradition of *bhikshā* was given up in the interest of greater efficiency. But both Kalyanananda and Nischayananda regretted being deprived of the splendid freedom of begging.

The Emergence of other Centres

The next Sevashrama to come up was at Vrindavan, where there was no facility for treatment of the multitude of pilgrims. In January 1907, taking their cue from the activities at Varanasi Sevashrama, some local people

organized themselves into a committee to start a Sevashrama, of whom Jajneswar Chandra and his son were the central figures. They were joined by Brahmachāri Harendra of Belur Math. The Sevashrama was initially located in the outer area of Kalababu's Kunja, the ancestral property of Balaram Bose, where the patients were accommodated. The management passed on to the Mission on 12 January 1908, and in 1912 the number of hospital beds had gone from four to fifteen. A plot of land measuring 8.32 acres was secured in 1915 on which a temporary structure was constructed so as to shift the Sevashrama from Kalababu's kunja. Gradually a male and a female wards were constructed.

The next Sevashrama to come up was at Allahabad in 1908, followed by many others, viz. Lucknow (1914), Contai (1913), Bankura (1917), Sonargaon in Dhaka (1915), Garbeta, Midnapur, etc. These Sevashramas were a very important feature of the Ramakrishna Mission's medical services, since whatever aspect the numerous subsequent activities assumed — whether dispensaries, hospitals or polyclinics — they were, as it were, the great branching out of the Sevashrama Movement. The organization of a Sevashrama is simple enough: the monks dispense medicines or attend to and nurse the patients personally. For the first time, perhaps, in the history of Indian monasticism, sadhus confronted God in pain and suffering and in need of the worship of care. The monks thus clearly demonstrated that the invalid, the forlorn, the diseased, and the poor were their God. Persons lying uncared for by the roadside were special objects of their adoration. Inspired by the examples of Swamis Shubhananda and Achalananda, and Kalyanananda and Nischayananda, many young workers, monastic and non-monastic, professional doctors and untrained workers, came forward to render their service.

It must be remembered, however, that the work of the Sevashramas was not always smooth sailing. The fact is that during the early decades there was always financial difficulty. The period of the first World War between 1914 to 1919 was especially trying. Then there were people who vacillated in helping. One person, long after making a donation for building a ward in memory of his father, started doubting the integrity and permanency of the work and imposed such conditions that the Sevashrama had to borrow the amount from another source and return it to him. However, the monks did not always rely on human help to get over financial difficulties. They

had firm faith that they were doing the Lord's work, and during financial stringency, they would do collective or personal introspection to find out whether they were deviating from the ideal. It was observed that as soon as any imperfection or error was spotted and corrected, help flowed in and the difficulty disappeared.

The attitude of the workers of the Sevashramas is perhaps best expressed in the words of Swami Nischayananda to 'M'. Seeing Swami Nischayananda engaged day and night in work, 'M' remarked: 'Look here Nischay, Thakur used to say, "The ideal of the sadhu's life is God realization, and not mere work."' When 'M' repeated this twice or thrice, Nischayananda could not control himself, and bursting into tears he said with folded hands, 'I am Swamiji's bond slave; I know no other spiritual practice than work, to which I have been commissioned by him. I have vowed to hold on to this path.' 'M' was not only silenced but understood and apologized. Another monk was engaged in the work of growing vegetables in the fields of Varanasi Sevashrama. When asked why he was thus labouring in the scorching sun when as a monk he should have been reading the *Gita* or meditating, he replied unambiguously: 'Why, I am growing vegetables which will be eaten by the sick-Narayanas.' Another monk also had spent his whole life dressing the wounds of the 'sick-Narayanas' to the extent that his knees became stiff due to constant standing. For these monks, work was worship, and the ideal of 'for one's own liberation and for the good of the world' was ever bright before their eyes.

These earliest Sevashramas had the great privilege of having the blessings and guidance of Swami Brahmananda, the first President of the Mission, and other great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, who visited these centres whenever possible. Swami Turiyananda lived at Kankhal for some time and passed his last days at Varanasi. The very presence of these spiritual giants would raise the minds of the workers to a higher spiritual plane. They, and the earlier pioneers, instructed the workers so that they could work in the spirit of consecration and check the work from becoming degraded into a mere secular activity. Swami Achalananda, for example, would never use the word 'patient'. Instead he would say 'Narayana', and expected everyone else to do the same.

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal

Monks of Kankhal Sevashrama serving the sick

Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi

The charitable dispensary at Belur Math

Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium, Ranchi

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindavan

Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Calcutta

Later Developments

The next phase in the development of medical services of the Ramakrishna Mission was marked by the starting of regular medical institutions — hospitals or out-patient dispensaries for the relief of medical problems in the community. The starting of Shishumangal for maternity and child care in Calcutta, the charitable tuberculosis clinic at New Delhi, and the tuberculosis sanatorium at Ranchi are three such institutions. This phase also included the much needed upgrading and modernizing of the Sevashramas.

While in the USA, Swami Dayananda was greatly impressed by the medical advances there. After returning to India in 1931 he started a centre called 'Shishumangal' (Children's Welfare) in Calcutta with only seven beds 'with the object of safeguarding maternal and infantile health'. This maternity, pre-natal and post-natal care hospital, due to its remarkable efficiency, soon became well known, and in 1939 it had its own building with fifty beds and auxiliaries. It was expanded into a General Hospital in 1956, and in 1957, it was renamed 'Seva Pratishthan'. It is now a giant institution of 550 beds with four wings: (a) General hospital, (b) School of Nursing, (c) Post-Graduate Medical College and Research Centre, and (d) Community Health Service. Recently, in October 2005, a College of Nursing was inaugurated there with BSc (Hons) course.

Because of the high incidence of tuberculosis in India, it was decided to start a tuberculosis sanatorium. Accordingly, in 1939, 240 acres of land was acquired at Dungri in Bihar (presently in Jharkhand), ten miles from Ranchi, and the sanatorium was opened in 1951 with 32 beds. It now has 280 beds with several ancillary departments. At Delhi, too, there is a TB clinic started in 1948, which has a well-equipped diagnostic laboratory. It also has a home treatment scheme under which health workers and doctors are deputed to educate and treat those who do not attend the clinic. These two TB institutions have been acclaimed as among the best in the country.

Realizing the need for modernization and upgrading, the Varanasi Sevashrama opened a block with an operation theatre and a dressing room for women in 1948; two x-ray units were installed in 1951; and a building to house diathermy and infra-red equipment was constructed in 1953. In 1955, the out-patient department was extended, and in 1956, a surgical ward with 18

beds was constructed in the women's department. It is now a full-fledged hospital of 230 beds, with a busy operation theatre and surgical department, and almost all specialities and some super-specialities. A number of visiting consultants and specialists render honorary service, and some resident doctors are appointed.

The Kankhal Sevashrama has also been upgraded. An overhead water tank was constructed in 1953, and the doctors' quarters and x-ray block in 1956. It is now a hospital of 122 beds. The Vrindavan Sevashrama started an eye hospital in 1943, which has since then earned a very good reputation. These hospitals were greatly benefitted by equipment and other grants from State and Central governments during this phase of modernization. The government grants, however, are neither always available nor adequate, and the institutions have to depend upon public donations. Yet most of the institutions are able to render free medical service to a substantial proportion of their patients.

Apart from the centres engaged solely in medical service, various Math and Mission centres started charitable out-patient dispensaries, which, in the course of time, developed into well-equipped dispensaries providing allopathic and/or homoeopathic treatment. Some have their unique features, e.g. ayurvedic treatment, physiotherapy, acupuncture, etc. The 275 bed hospital at Thiruvananthapuram has a psychiatry section. One of the recent developments has been the introduction of Mobile Medical Units by a number of medical centres, enabling them to extend medical services to those remote corners of rural and tribal areas which had remained mostly inaccessible.

It is not possible to go into the details of the growth of each institution. We have therefore tried to describe in some detail only the oldest and the most representative.

One of the special features of the Mission institutions is their achievement of the best possible results and a high standard of service — both technical and humanitarian — with the least possible expenditure. This is partly due to the honorary services offered by local medical practitioners. The personal care taken by the monks adds to this economy and efficiency. In many hospitals, monks act not only as administrators but also as nurses, compounders, dressers, and doctors. And because of the presence of these monks, who consider their duty a service to God, and attend personally to the details and bestow sympathy

to all irrespective of the caste, creed, and social status of the patient, the patients feel quite at home in these institutions, a fact which explains their continuous public acceptance.

Conclusion

The medical scene has undergone a great change during the past few decades. The disease patterns have changed and new concepts of health care and medicine have evolved. These changes can be summarized in three words: commercialization, technicalization, and globalization. Medicine today is no more the humanitarian art and science that it used to be, but has become a lucrative business — something which was decried in no uncertain terms by Sri Ramakrishna more than a century ago. While technical advancements have wrought wonders in certain fields, it has made modern medicine extremely expensive, elite-oriented, and beyond the reach of the common man. Communicable diseases and problems of socio-preventive medicines related to poverty and sanitation have assumed gigantic proportions in a third-world country like India. The Mission has a glorious record of a century of medical service under difficult conditions. In this 21st century it will have to face these new challenges of providing cost-effective remedies and bringing the most modern medical, scientific and technological advances to the poorest in the remotest corners of India. At the same time it will have to maintain the high standard of dedicated service and motivate even the self-seeking medical practitioners to provide what little selfless service they can. The Mission has done this in the past and has the potential to do it for many centuries to come.

Today the Ramakrishna Mission's medical services range from the humble homoeopathic dispensary to the super-speciality hospital. Yet it does not boast of its numerous medical centres, the large number of patients served, or the high technical sophistication achieved by some of its institutions. Its glory lies in the spirit with which patients are served. Serving one patient with the right attitude, truly considering him a God, is far superior to serving a multitude without it.

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Ramakrishna Mission's Relief and Rehabilitation Services

SWAMI MUKTINATHANANDA

The Beginning

The history of the Ramakrishna Mission's relief services is as old as that of the Mission itself because its first organized relief work was started by Swami Akhandananda hardly two weeks after the Mission was founded by Swami Vivekananda on 1st May 1897.

After his triumphal return from the West, Swamiji stayed for a while in Calcutta and then proceeded to Darjiling to recuperate his health and rest for a few days. Since the Alambazar Math seemed desolate due to his absence, Swami Akhandananda set out as a wandering monk along the bank of the Ganges with a view to seeing Navadwip, Murshidabad, and a few other places of interest in North Bengal. However, a famine was then raging in the Nadia and Murshidabad districts, and he was shocked to see the misery and utter helplessness of the famished people of those places. When he reached a small village named Bhabda, he felt a strong urge to give up his journey and stay there to serve the starving people. Eventually he settled down in the nearby village of Mahula, which was 10 kilometres from Berhampore and severely affected by the famine. Notwithstanding his own penniless condition, he prayed to Sri Ramakrishna every day with tears in his eyes to enable him to serve those poor people. He also sent three letters to Swami Premananda at Alambazar Math giving detailed descriptions of the calamity and asking for help. On hearing about these letters, however, Swami Ramakrishnananda wrote to him

from Madras: 'You are a penniless sannyāsin. It is impossible for you to arrange food for thousands of people. Therefore, you should return to the Math.'[1] Swami Brahmananda too advised him to come back to the Math. Nevertheless, Swami Akhandananda became so overwhelmed at the destitution of the villagers that he resolved not to move from there until he could do something for those hapless people. In the meantime Swamiji returned from Darjiling and became much perturbed on going through Swami Akhandananda's three letters giving a graphic description of the famine. He at once sent two monastic workers and Rs. 150/- with the instruction to start work immediately. Thus began the first relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission on 15 May 1897 with the distribution of rice among 18 famine-stricken families at Mahula in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. Indeed, it was a historic event, for it marked a new phase in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement.

The distribution of rice was continued for several months, and it covered many families in the neighbouring villages as well. Unfortunately, the situation became worse when a severe earthquake rocked Mahula and nearby villages. But finally the work was concluded after a mass feast and distribution of a large number of clothes. It may be mentioned here that many of the beneficiaries of this first relief work were Muslims.

The Inspiration

Swami Akhandananda drew inspiration for his humanitarian services primarily from his Master. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'If God can be worshipped through a clay image, then why not through a man?'[2] While explaining the essential doctrine of the Vaishnava religion, he said: '...compassion for all beings.... No, no, it is not compassion to jīvas but service to them as Shiva.'[3] It was this idea that Swami Vivekananda later developed into his philosophy of service.

Sri Ramakrishna himself initiated primary relief operations on at least two occasions, viz. at Deoghar and Kalaighat. Swami Saradananda, a disciple of the Master, describes the two scenes as follows:

> The Master's heart was filled with compassion to see the poverty and misery of the village people when going through a village near Vaidyanath at the time of his pilgrimage to Kashi, Vrindavan and other holy places with

Mathur. 'Your are', said he to Mathur, 'but a manager of the Mother's estate. Give these people sufficient oil to cool their heads and each a piece of cloth to wear and feed them to their fill once.' At first Mathur was a little hesitant and said, 'Father, the pilgrimage will require much money, and the poor are too many. I may later be in want of money if I begin to do all that. What do you advise under these circumstances?' But the Master was not satisfied with this reply. There was an incessant flow of tears from his eyes to see the misery of the villagers and his heart was filled with an unprecedented compassion. 'You rascal, I will not go to your Kashi. I will remain here with them; they have none to call their own; I will not leave them behind and go.' Saying so, he became obstinate like a boy and went and sat down amongst the poor people. Seeing such compassion in the Master, Mathur had bundles of cloth brought from Calcutta and did as Father had asked him to do. Beside himself with joy to see the villagers happy. Father also bade goodbye to them and started gladly with Mathur on his journey to Kashi.[4]

Another instance is to the point. Some time in 1870, Mathur Babu, while going out to visit one of his estates for the collection of rent, took Ramakrishna with him. From the worldly point of view, this turned out to be a folly, for which Mathur Babu had to pay heavily. His tenants, at that time, were passing through a crisis. For two consecutive years the harvest had failed, and this had brought the people of the locality to the verge of starvation. Ramakrishna's tender heart was shocked by the sight of appalling poverty around him, and he immediately asked Mathur Babu to feed the tenants and help them financially instead of demanding his dues from them. He convinced Mathur Babu of the fact that the Divine Mother was really the owner of the property, that he was only Her steward, and as such he ought to spend Mother's money for allaying the miseries of Her tenants. Mathur Babu had to act up to Ramakrishna's advice, and thus undoubtedly he set an example of the correct attitude of a landlord towards his tenants.[5]

The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi too actively participated in famine relief when she was merely eleven years old. In 1864, a terrible famine broke out in Bengal. Her father, though not affluent, opened his granary and started a free kitchen at his home for feeding the starving poor people. The Holy Mother described it thus:

> What a dire famine raged there once, and how many starving people came to our house! We had stocked the previous year's produce. My father had the paddy husked into rice and got potfuls of *khichudi* [rice with lentils] cooked.... On some days the number of people became so great that *khichudi* ran short. Cooking would restart at once. No sooner was the hot food served on the leaves than I would fan it with both hands so that it might cool quickly. For, alas, the hungry stomachs could not brook delay![6]

After the demise of Sri Ramakrishna, when Swami Vivekananda was travelling in different parts of India as a wandering monk, he was deeply moved to see the utter poverty and backwardness of the poor people of India. He decided to dedicate his life to the uplift of the downtrodden masses of India. One of the main reasons for his going to the West was to seek funds for his work in India. His monastic brother, Swami Akhandananda, who also led a wandering life, came to be greatly influenced by the extraordinary life of Jhandhu Bhat Vithalji, an Ayurvedic physician, at Jamnagar in Gujarat. About him, Swami Vivekananda once remarked, 'I have seen many benevolent persons, but none can compare with Jhandhu Bhat Vithalji.'[7]

'Bhatji's house was more like a hospital. It was full of patients suffering from various ailments, for whom Bhatji provided both treatment and diet. His medicines were free to rich and poor alike, and these even included costly items like Makaradhwaja, an Ayurvedic specific. After giving the prescription, he would go out in a horse-carriage to visit his patients free of charge.'[8]

During his wandering days, Swami Akhandananda, as if by the benign dispensation of God, spent a year at Jamnagar and stayed at Bhatji's place for several months. Later he confessed: 'Serving and loving man is the highest good. This I have learned especially by seeing it practised in Bhatji's life.'[9] Bhatji was then about seventy years old. He would often recite to himself with great feeling the Sanskrit couplet: 'Is there any way by which I may enter into the bodies of other beings and suffer their pains myself?'[10] Swami Akhandananda too used to chant these lines as a mantra. This saying of Rantideva opened in his heart the well-spring of sympathy for the suffering of others and drew him more and more to the ideal of service.[11] He was also deeply touched by another verse which Bhatji used to chant quite often: 'I covet not any earthly

kingdom, nor heaven, nor even salvation. The only thing I desire is the removal of the miseries of the afflicted.'[12]

The Relief Work in Rajputana

With this change in his outlook, Swami Akhandananda went to the neighbouring state of Rajputana and travelled through its villages for about eight months. He was deeply pained to see the utter misery of the poor peasants. As he searched for the cause of the suffering of the downtrodden in India, he realized that this evil was only because of social inequality. He came to the conclusion that the first step towards improving the condition of the people was to provide their basic needs. The spiritual regeneration of the country would come about in its normal course if the basic needs of the hungry masses were met first. However, he had a lingering doubt whether Swamiji would encourage him in this seemingly secular work. He therefore wrote a letter to Swamiji giving all the details and seeking his advice.

The long-awaited reply of Swamiji written from Chicago arrived in June 1894. Swamiji wrote:

> Go from door to door amongst the poor and lower classes of the town of Khetri and teach them religion.... No good will come of sitting idle and having princely dishes, and saying, 'Ramakrishna, O Lord!' — unless you can do some good to the poor.... Work, worship, and *jñāna* (knowledge) — first work, and your mind will be purified.... The gerua robe is not for enjoyment. It is the banner of heroic work. You must give your body, mind, and speech to 'the welfare of the world'.... The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted — let these be your God. Know that service to these alone is the highest religion.[13]

On receipt of this letter Swami Akhandananda, with joy and enthusiasm, resolved to dedicate himself to this work. He immediately started a school at Khetri for the poor servant boys of the palace and constantly supervised the work for about six months till the school started functioning smoothly. The experience he gathered at Jamnagar and Khetri thus served as a good preparation for him to undertake the first relief work of the Mission three years later at Mahula in the Murshidabad district of Bengal (described at the beginning of this article).

Plague Relief in Calcutta

After the famine relief work in Murshidabad, the next most important relief work of the Mission was the relief in the plague-affected areas of Calcutta. The plague first broke out in Calcutta in the year 1898. The people panicked and started moving out of the city helter-skelter. Though the Government arranged for vaccination against the plague, there was a wide-spread rumour that the Government was killing the people by those vaccines. As a result, the situation became worse. Swami Vivekananda was then resting in Darjiling. Hearing the tragic news he rushed to Calcutta and convened a meeting of monastics at the Math, which was then at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house in Belur. Swamiji emphatically said:

> Look here, we have assembled here in the name of God. We will have to nurse the plague-patients without caring for our lives. If necessary, we are ready to sell away the new Math premises or give up our lives for nursing and treating the plague-affected.[14]

In order to restore normalcy, Swamiji printed a handbill in Bengali and Hindi and arranged to distribute it free among the citizens of Calcutta. The circular read in part as follows:

> Don't be afraid. There is no reason to become panicky.... Don't believe in rumours. The British Government does not give vaccination forcibly.... Let the rich fly away. We are poor, we realise the pang of the poor.... If you have none to help you, immediately send word to the servants of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math. We will extend our help as much as possible by the grace of the Divine Mother.[15]

Fortunately, the outbreak subsided soon and there was no need to start any relief. However, the plague reappeared as an epidemic the next year, i.e. in 1899. People started dying in large numbers. Again there was panic.

'The Ramakrishna Mission immediately swung into action with plague relief work on Good Friday, the 31st of March 1899, under Swamiji's instruction, and did considerable work in a well-organized way. Swamiji himself came to live in a poor house to inspire courage in the people and cheer up the workers. The whole management was placed in the hands of Sister Nivedita as President

and Secretary, Swami Sadananda as the Officer-in-chief, and Swamis Shivananda, Nityananda, and Atmananda as assistants.'[16] Sister Nivedita set a splendid example by sweeping some of the houses and lanes with a broom.

The monastics and volunteers of the Mission worked day and night for the eradication of the disease. They even cleaned the stinking latrines and drains and sprinkled disinfectants. The *Indian Mirror* wrote on 29 April 1900:

> The Ramakrishna Mission...plague...volunteers...are to be met within Calcutta in the dirtiest streets and filthiest bustees [settlements], helping to clear plague-spots, encouraging the people, consoling them in their affection and teaching them to live clean lives. And this is done without the expenditure of much money.[17]

Though the disease subsided in 1899, it broke out again in 1900 with greater devastating effects. The Mission continued its relief services till the disease was eradicated. The dedication and sacrificing spirit of the relief workers served as a source of inspiration for posterity.

Subsequent Relief Operations

Subsequently, various relief operations were conducted by the Mission throughout the country whenever calamities occurred. A list of different relief services undertaken during the past century is given in Appendix A-1. The Mission's year-wise expenditure during the last two decades is also graphically presented in Appendix A-2. While it is redundant to reproduce here the names of each and every relief operation carried out in the past, a few notable relief services will be mentioned in a later section. Prior to that, it will be of interest to discuss in a general way how relief services are conducted by the Mission.

Modus Operandi

Relief services are generally undertaken by the Mission whenever there is any calamity of significant dimension. Calamities are of two types: natural and man-made. Flood, famine, drought, earthquake, cyclone, tidal wave, forest fire, etc. constitute natural calamities, while riots, communal disturbances, arson, accidental fire, etc. fall under the category of man-made calamities.

As soon as the news of a major calamity is heard over the media, the Mission immediately sends a team to the affected area to assess the extent of damage and determine the exact requirement of the affected people. In consultation with government administration, if it is found that it is necessary to start the relief work, a detailed survey is conducted and identity cards are issued to the selected beneficiaries as fast as possible. Relief materials are immediately procured and transported to the site. The relief materials are then distributed in a systematic manner with proper documentation. Usually local volunteers are engaged for smooth and safe completion of the work.

It goes without saying that 'late relief is no relief'. Therefore, every effort is made to make relief materials available to the beneficiaries as quickly as possible. However, prolonged relief defeats the very purpose of relief. That is why relief work is terminated as soon as normalcy is restored.

It should be remembered that the Ramakrishna Mission's relief work constitutes a part of the spiritual practice performed with a spirit of dedication and service. As Swamiji said, 'It is the giver who is blessed, not the receiver.' Once Swami Premananda instructed the new brahmachārins engaged in relief work, saying: 'Thakur has not sent you there merely for the distribution of a handful of rice. Rather you should impart divinity and greatness. Learn how to acquire a lofty mind and large heart. Such an opportunity will never come again.' He further sent a set of instructions to the relief workers engaged in the Bankura Famine Relief during 1915-16, wherein he wrote: 'Due to the merits of many previous lives, you have obtained this rare gift of Swamiji in the form of service to the needy. Even then if you are unable to equate the study of Vedanta with service to living beings, then you are far from the great men like Buddha down to Vivekananda.'[19] It is this attitude which adds a special dimension to the relief activities of the Mission, making it distinct from those of other agencies.

Three Phases of Relief

Relief work is generally conducted in 3 phases:

- Primary relief
- Rehabilitation
- Follow-up programmes

Primary Relief: Though evacuation forms the first part of the relief, especially in the wake of flood, tidal wave, tornado, etc., this work is usually taken up by military and para-military forces as it requires professional skills as well as adequate infrastructure. Our primary relief generally starts with distribution of food materials — dry as well as cooked, depending upon the situation. Afterwards, a fresh survey is conducted for distribution of clothes, blankets, lanterns, utensils, and other necessities of domestic use. Sometimes seeds and fertilizers are given as agricultural aids. Drinking water is supplied in case of drought relief, and fodder is given to drought-stricken cattle. Medical relief is also conducted after a calamity when there is a significant number of patients. Milk and biscuits or baby food are given to children as well as expectant and lactating mothers. It should be mentioned here that non-monastic volunteers very often help Ramakrishna Mission monks and novices in conducting relief operations.

Rehabilitation: When a large number of dwelling houses has been devastated by the calamity, steps are taken to rehabilitate at least the worst affected people. The dimensions of primary relief and rehabilitation obviously depend on the availability of funds and monastic manpower. Plans for the new houses are prepared by professional engineers taking into account local conditions. An estimate is also prepared to ascertain the cost and the time required for the project. Subsequently, the work is conducted usually with the help of labour contractors under monastic supervision. During rehabilitation work monks and novices usually stay at a private or public building given for their use by the local people. The work usually lasts for several months. Sometimes it may continue for two or three years.

In order to involve the beneficiaries more and more in building their own houses, a 'build your own house scheme' has been adopted by the Mission during the last two decades. According to this scheme, the beneficiaries are required to construct their own houses as per a given design, suited to their environment. Building materials as well as the cost of unskilled labour are supplied to the beneficiaries by stages. Assistance of skilled labour, whenever necessary, is also provided. In this scheme the villagers feel identified with their new homes and take every possible care for its continued maintenance. The wastage of materials is minimum due to constant supervision, and the cost of the project also becomes substantially less.

Follow-up Programmes: Occasionally post-housing follow-up programmes are also taken up with the aim of integrated development of one or more selected villages. The dimensions and scope of this work too depend on the availability of time and money for such projects.

Source of Finance

The large-hearted public and also benevolent institutions at home and abroad form the major sources of finance for the Mission's relief activities. Besides, the Mission maintains a Provident Relief Fund at the Headquarters which provides for all relief and rehabilitation activities throughout the country. In cases of major calamities of large proportion, appeals are circulated over the media and the relief is conducted out of the earmarked contributions. In some cases, the Government too extends assistance in cash or kind.

Some Major Relief and Rehabilitation Operations

Bihar Earthquake Relief: In between the two World Wars, India suffered a major set-back due to a devastating earthquake that rocked virtually the whole of Bihar causing untold sufferings to innumerable human beings and cattle. Thousands of homes were razed to the ground and the total loss was colossal. In accordance with their tradition, the Ramakrishna Mission rushed primary relief materials to the unfortunate quake victims and subsequently helped them rebuild their ruined houses. Swami Virajananda, the then Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, published a report on 17 June 1934:[20]

> The centres at Sitamarhi, Gangeya and Papri in Muzaffarpur District, and at Jayanagar in Darbhanga District, having been closed after the necessary primary relief work, we have been continuing the activities in seven districts of Bihar, viz. Muzaffarpur, Champaran, Darbhanga, Chapra, Patna, Monghyr and Bhagalpur, through the other centres of the Mission. Our attention is mainly confined to the construction of semi-permanent houses for the middle-class families and supplying the materials for the same, repairing of damaged houses and restoring or sinking of wells. Rice distribution is going on only from Tateria in Champaran District.

The following is a brief report of the activities of the different centres up to 14 June.

At Muzaffarpur a colony named 'Ramakrishna Nagar' was formed with 87 complete quarters (all separate) in the Wilson's Compound, and 76 huts were constructed on the people's own sites. Fifteen huts are under construction and 40 more are still to be erected. Materials or cash or both were supplied for building 36 huts.

The report further details the district-wise statistics and concludes with the following:

We have to continue the relief work for some time more. As the rain has set in, we are trying to finish the work of house-building as early as possible. It has been possible for us to continue the work so far with the help of kind and generous contributions from the charitable public....

Swami Virajananda presented another report the following month, which read in part: 'The relief work in Bihar is almost coming to a close. We have closed all the centres except those at Muzaffarpur, Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Motihari where the relief work will have to be continued for about a month more. The total receipts for the earthquake relief so far are Rs. 1,12,721.56, and the total expenditure up to date being Rs. 1,10,067.20. We hope that with the balance of Rs. 2,654.36 the remaining work can be finished.'[21] The concluding report of the earthquake relief, however, was dated 7 October 1934:

Our earthquake relief in Bihar was stopped in September. The audited account of the same will be soon published.[22]

The aforesaid reports not only reveal the vast dimension of the relief but also indicate the meticulous care taken to give precise information to the interested public at large.

East Bengal Riot Relief: 'Riot in Noakhali and Tippera Districts began on the 10th of October, 1946. As soon as information reached the Mission Headquarters at Belur, a band of monastic workers was dispatched to the affected places for inspection and bringing succour to the distressed people. On 22 October a relief centre was started at Chandpur, from which food grains

were supplied daily to some 2,000 people. The Mission also took over the management of two relief centres opened there by the Government, which distributed food to nearly 3,000 people everyday. Steps were taken to minister to their other needs too.'[23]

The work of the Mission continued from October 1946 to December 1948 and covered 140 villages. The relief was given under the following headings: a) Gratuitous Relief, b) Educational help, c) Medical help, d) Rehabilitation, e) House construction, f) Test Relief Work, g) Spiritual succour, h) and Pecuniary help. The total expenditure for the aforesaid work was Rs. 3,25,500.

Kurukshetra Refugee Relief: 'Consequent on the partition of the Punjab and the heavy influx of refugees into the Indian section, the Mission started Refugee Relief Work at Kurukshetra. The Central Government appreciated the preliminary work of the Mission and requisitioned its services in wider fields. The work was started in October 1947 and continued till May 1948.

'The Mission workers helped the Government to locate really needy persons for distribution of about 20,000 blankets. For this purpose they went at dead of night from tent to tent and issued tickets to those who were without any warm clothing. These tickets were exchanged at the Government depot the next day for blankets or quilts. In addition, the Mission distributed 4,08,096 tins (mostly one pound) of fruit juices, 51,600 multi-vitamin tablets, 13,098 garments, 2,303 blankets, and 7,820 utensils, most of which items were supplied by the Government. Besides, the Mission ran a milk canteen from October 1947 to April 1948 and conducted four new dispensaries with an average daily attendance of about 275, comprising mainly dysentery and diarrhoea cases.'[24]

East Pakistan Refugee Relief: In 1947, when refugees from East Pakistan started coming to West Bengal, the Ramakrishna Mission started relief work for them on a small scale. Many displaced boys and girls were maintained in different institutions of the Mission. A refugee colony was slowly built up near Agartala. A relief centre was also opened at Lumbding (Assam) in December 1949.

At the request of the Government of West Bengal, the Mission took up the work of giving immediate relief to the refugees from East Bengal in the

Calcutta industrial area in May 1948. Food stuffs, cash, and clothing, supplied by the Government, were distributed from two branch centres of the Mission, viz. the Saradapitha, Belur, and the Boys' Home, Rahara. This work was continued up to 16 March 1949.

Upon the recurrence of communal troubles the following year, relief centres were opened in April 1950 in various places of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Silchar, Bangaon, Malda, Cooch-Behar, Murshidabad, and Patna districts. About 300 refugees were given food and shelter for a number of days in the Mission centres at Dhaka and Narayanganj. In all the above centres thousands of refugees were received and provided with temporary shelter, food, and clothing.

In June 1950, when a large number of refugees were stranded at the Sealdah Station in Calcutta, the Mission served cooked food to about 12,000 refugees every day for a period of nearly 3 months.

Later on, systematic rehabilitation of the refugees was taken up. Thus, by 1950, the Mission had succeeded in rehabilitating about 400 families at Agartala, Sonebill (near Karimganj), Malda, Simurali, and Bandipur (24 Parganas). By 1953, the number had risen to 1,583.[25]

Burma Evacuees' Relief: Another notable relief service conducted after the Second World War was the Burma Evacuees' Relief at Dimapur. After the partition, a large number of people who had settled in Burma started fleeing out of the country being unable to withstand the deplorable situation prevailing there at that time. Most of them travelled by road and entered the Indian territory through Dimapur. Their wretched and helpless condition begged description. Swami Bhuteshananda, the then Head of the Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong, led the relief work and presented a graphic narration of the same, brief excerpts of which are given below from his tape-recorded reminiscences:

> On being requested by the Government, the Mission started an evacuees' camp at Dimapur around 1948. The immediate work of the Mission consisted mainly of receiving the refugees in the Transit Camps before their transhipment to various places in India, looking to their medical needs, supplying prophylactics against infectious diseases, feeding the incoming refugees, providing diet for the sick and milk for babies, etc. Most of the relief materials were supplied by the Government while the management

was done by the Mission. The relief was conducted under most trying situations since the whole place was filled with stinky mud, squalor, wailing of dying patients, and clamour of frustrated human beings devoid of food, shelter, drinking water, clothes, or belongings. On top of this there were frequent bombings by the enemy causing further panic and instability in the camp. This was the most difficult relief in the history of Ramakrishna Mission.

Bangladesh Evacuees' Relief in 1971: 'Seldom has human misery been seen on such a scale as when ten million refugees took shelter in India following the Pakistani military crackdown in what was then East Pakistan in March 1971. As if a human tidal wave was swarming over the borders: wild-eyed men and women fleeing homes of torture, ignominy, and death, all reduced to skeletons through hunger and exhaustion, and some of them carrying gunshot wounds from which they died. Many died on the way from disease, especially old people and children. The refugees lay down wherever they could find an open space, quietly awaiting what fate might bring them.'[26]

Since the situation was too stupendous to be treated by any single Government, many voluntary agencies appeared on the scene with relief materials. The Ramakrishna Mission too started its first camp on 13 April 1971 through its branch at Katihar in Bihar, to provide shelter, food, and necessities to the incoming refugees. The Government, through its local officials, had already been doing whatever it could to help relieve the hardship of the people, but what was needed was a human touch to the work to heal the wounds in the minds of the people. As the Ramakrishna Mission is a non-sectarian and non-political philanthropic organization, its workers had an advantage and naturally the Government officials relied heavily on them.

Soon more camps were organized by the Mission at different points of the border ranging from Tripura, Meghalaya, down to West Bengal, the total population under its care at the peak period being 2,20,000. In all the camps run by the Mission, food, clothing, medicine, etc. were provided to all the refugees. Of course, the Government helped with money and sometimes also with materials, but the Mission supplemented these to the extent necessary to ensure that the refugees did not miss anything essential. As cooked food had the risk of getting contaminated, dry rations (rice, lentils, and vegetables) were

distributed once a week, sometimes twice a week. Besides, milk was supplied to children and adults every morning. To avoid omissions or duplication, a register was maintained in which full details of the families living in the camps were recorded. The heads of the families were given identity cards. Supplies were issued to the families only on presentation of these cards. Besides distributing food materials, the Mission also distributed clothes, blankets, utensils, shoes, soap, mosquito-nets, quilts, text books, stationery, and even sports equipment. Every necessity of life had to be given, for most people had lost everything and had to begin life again from scratch. There were many tradesmen who needed tools and implements. These too were supplied to them. This was followed by providing houses to the beneficiaries. Building materials, viz. bamboo, nails, corrugated iron sheets, etc. were supplied, while the labour was provided by the families themselves. By December 1973, 1,466 houses were constructed and 248 tube wells were sunk to supply safe drinking water. For the work in Bangladesh proper, the Mission spent well over Rs. 1 crore in cash and kind. Several schools were also set up to provide education for the refugee children, while arrangements were made for their recreation too.

On the whole the Mission could soon bring normalcy among the dazed refugees, who started returning to their homesteads in response to the call from the newly-formed Government of Bangladesh asking the refugees to return home.

Andhra Pradesh Tidal Wave & Cyclone Relief and Rehabilitation 1977-78: 'Remember, remember the month of November' — so goes the proverb in the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh which are prone to onslaughts of cyclones of various dimensions almost every year. However, the devastation of 1977 was quite different. On the 19th of November 1977, a terrible cyclone with a velocity of 200 kilometres per hour, followed by a twenty foot high tidal wave, shattered the coastal villages of Divi Taluka in Kishra district, 350 square kilometres of which were flooded. Consequently, there was neither a single house, a tree, nor even a telegraph pole left standing. While the army rushed in helicopters, the pilots saw no land to descend upon. It was all water. They saw thousands of corpses moving with the tide, hundreds caught in bushes, while the hut-tops were floating silently. This was one of the worst natural disasters in the country! More than 10,000 people and one lakh heads of cattle

were dead; nearly 16,000 houses were razed to the ground. The tidal wave had affected more than 70,000 people, while 34,000 people had lost their houses.[27]

As soon as the news was heard over the media, the Ramakrishna Mission organized a massive relief operation and rushed essential relief materials to the worst affected areas. Cooked food was served to 2.5 million flood victims to whom woollen and cotton blankets, saris, dhotis, lungis, children's garments, utensils, candles, soap, and other amenities of domestic use were also given. This was followed by a massive rehabilitation project.

It was decided to construct 1,000 pucca (RCC) cyclone-proof houses for the worst affected cyclone victims. A production centre was established at Puligudda on the bank of the river Krishna, where pressed cement panels were manufactured with the help of twelve electrically operated hydraulic press machines and ten curing tanks. Nearly 600 labourers, skilled and unskilled, were employed. The sites where the houses were erected were situated 30 kilometres around the production centre from where finished panels etc. were transported by a fleet of trucks. The Mission adopted 10 such sites scattered all over the remote coastal regions where sweet water was a rarity and where the connecting roads were extremely bad. Notwithstanding the formidable problems standing in the way of the completion of the houses, the entire project was finished within 15 months, i.e. by April 1979. The newly built colonies were inaugurated one after another by notable dignitaries, including the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Minister of the State, amidst great festivity and to the joy of the villagers. The cost of constructing 1,000 houses was Rs. 50 lakhs, 50% of which was received as subsidies from the State Government. Besides, 3 double-storeyed shelter houses-cum-community halls, internal roads, etc. were also constructed, for which there was an additional expenditure of nearly Rs. 20 lakhs. Incidentally, the houses and the other structures have remained unaffected, notwithstanding the repeated cyclones in the region during the subsequent years.[28]

Maharashtra Earthquake Rehabilitation: On 30 September 1993 a devastating earthquake rocked vast areas in the Latur and Osmanabad districts of Maharashtra claiming thousands of lives and rendering thousands more homeless. The Ramakrishna Mission rushed food, clothes, utensils, and other primary relief materials to the affected areas to help restore normalcy as early as possible.

After concluding the primary relief work, the Mission started a rehabilitation project of constructing 646 quake-resistant houses for the weaker sections of the community rendered homeless by the tragic calamity in 3 villages, viz. Haregaon, Javalga Wadi, and Kawali, belonging to Ausa taluka of Latur district. Besides, 3 schools, 3 multipurpose Samaj Mandirs, 6 children's parks, internal roads, community water posts, etc. have also been provided in these three villages. Each house, with a carpet area of 250 square feet and a plinth area of 307 square feet, and with electric fixtures, cost around Rs. 55,000. The total cost of the entire project was Rs. 4.75 crores. Many large-hearted friends and well-wishers at home and abroad extended their generous help and cooperation towards the successful completion of the project.

On 17 February 1994, a sample house was inaugurated at Haregaon village, where the corner-stone of the proposed Samaj Mandir was also laid on that day. After almost 14 months, the newly constructed Haregaon village, consisting of 424 houses, a Samaj Mandir-cum-cummunity hall, 3 children's parks, water posts, etc. was inaugurated on 2 May 1995. The second and third colonies at Kawali and Javalga Wadi, consisting of similar infrastructures and 167 houses and 55 houses respectively, were declared open on 29 November 1995.

After completing the Rehabilitation Project, a follow-up programme was launched at Kawali village on 21 November 1995 by starting a rural fertilizer factory. Basically, it is a process of quickly converting kitchen waste and garden weeds into useful organic fertilizer with the help of a particular kind of microbe. Afterwards, this and other development projects were extended to the other two villages also.

Finally, in collaboration with Lokasiksha Parishad, Narendrapur, and Excel Industries, Bombay, the Mission implemented the following programmes in these villages, viz. Haregaon, Javalgawadi, and Kawali: crop development programme, bio-intensive garden, poultry programme, ādhunik chullah, installation of an irrigation system development programme, drought animal programme, entrepreneurship development programme, orchard plantation programme, afforestation programme, compost making, C.C.T. programme, primary heath care, saving and thrift, nala bunding, spill way dam, etc. Though the State Government had provided a detached toilet block (a two pit latrine and a bathroom) for each house, the toilet blocks were non-functional due to manufacturing defects. However, the Mission made the requisite repairs in

the said 3 villages. The women's activities at Kawali are housed at the spacious building of the Mahila Udyog Kendra where six sewing machines have been installed and a local girl engaged to train other ladies of the village. Arrangements have, however, been made to link this ladies' organization with the All India Women's Conference, Bombay. To complete the entire project, the Ramakrishna Mission spent nearly Rs. 60 lakhs. However, on 1 April 1999 the Headquarters concluded its involvement in the project so that it may run on its own. It is hoped that the Latur experiments will serve as a demonstration model for post-emergency relief and rehabilitation programmes towards long-term integrated development in a rural environment.

Andhra Pradesh Cyclone Rehabilitation: On 6 November 1996, a devastating cyclone hit the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh killing a large number of human beings and cattle, rendering thousands more homeless, uprooting numerous trees, and destroying vast areas of cultivatable land. The Ramakrishna Mission rushed primary relief material, including food, clothes, utensils, and various necessities of domestic use worth Rs. 30 lakhs, aimed towards restoring normalcy as fast as possible. This was followed by a rehabilitation project of constructing three cyclone shelter-cum-school buildings in three island villages, viz. Gurujapu Lanka, Lanka of Thane Lanka, and Yalakala Lanka of East Godavari districts, at a cost of Rs. 12 lakhs each, of which Rs. 3 lakhs was government subsidy. On normal days these shelters serve as village schools though they may also be used for community congregations, medical camps, marriages, etc. Besides providing electricity, water supply with overhead tanks, wash-rooms, etc., each shelter house is furnished with requisite furniture, black-boards and other items. Suitable children's books and various teaching aids have also been provided.

As a part of its integrated rural development programme, the Mission built 70 low cost latrines in the two island villages with the help of government subsidy and active participation of the beneficiaries. In response to the repeated appeals of the villagers to construct a bridge as a permanent solution to their age-old communication problem, the Mission took up the challenging task of constructing a 160 metre long and 7.5 metre wide pre-stressed concrete bridge across the Vruddha Gautami estuary at an estimated cost of Rs. 3.5 crores, 50% of which was borne by the State Government. Notwithstanding inclement

weather, the sudden rise in the level of the river water, and many other hazards, the bridge completed not only within the estimated cost but also within the stipulated time of 2 years, and was declared open on 12 January 2000. The bridge, named the *Vivekananda Bridge*, was inaugurated along with the unveiling of a 9½ feet bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda and a children's park near the entrance of the bridge on the mainland. Indeed, it was a centennial presentation of the Ramakrishna Mission Relief and Rehabilitation services dedicated to the service of humanity.

Orissa Super Cyclone Relief: An unprecedented Super Cyclone with a velocity of more than 300 kilometres per hour ruined vast coastal regions of Orissa around Paradwip on the 29 October 1999. Besides the death of thousands of human beings and cattle, and colossal damage to crops and properties, innumerable human beings were subjected to tremendous suffering for days together. Extensive primary relief work was conducted by the Mission in some of the worst affected areas of Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapar, Khurda, Puri, and three other districts. Large quantities of food materials, clothings, blankets, lanterns, utensils, etc. worth more than Rs. 1.2 crores were distributed among 9,000 families within a month. This was followed by a rehabilitation project of erecting 327 houses, 6 school-cum-cyclone shelters, installation of 25 tube wells and 20 hand pumps, etc. in Kanaguli village under the Ersama block of the Jagatsinghpur district. The project cost Rs. 4 crores and was concluded in September 2001.

Gujarat Earthquake Relief: It was the morning 26 January 2001, India's Republic Day. But unlike the usual Republic Day mornings, this one was marked by a gruesome tragedy. An unprecedented earthquake shook Gujarat in the early hours, leaving behind a trail of massive destruction. Bhuj being the worst affected province, the quake was called the Bhuj earthquake — one of the deadliest ever recorded in the country. At least 50,000 people perished on that fateful day, more than a lakh were injured, and around 6 lakhs of people were displaced. The quake razed down more than 3 lakhs of houses to dust. As usual, the Mission instantly sent relief to the victims through its different centres in Gujarat. The Headquarters deployed a dedicated band of monks for the task. As primary relief, cooked food, food packets, biscuits, drinking

water, rice, wheat, pulses, oil, bottles of blood, and other such commodities of daily use were distributed among the needy people of several villages of Kutch, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Porbandar, and Surendranagar districts. Garments, blankets, bed sheets, towels, and sweaters were also distributed. The Mission even provided 11,000 kilograms of firewood for cremation of dead bodies in different places. A medical camp was conducted at Bhuj and surrounding areas. Arrangements were made to provide the victims temporary shelter. Later, with a view to rehabilitate the worst affected victims, it constructed 390 quakeproof houses and 81 schools in the different affected parts of the State. This relief work continued for more than two years. It was concluded in April 2003, and the total cost of this rehabilitation project was nearly Rs. 16.90 crores.

We have discussed above only some of the important relief operations undertaken by the Mission. Apart from these major ones, the Mission conducted also the Orissa flood relief in July 2001, the Uttar Pradesh flood relief in September 2001, Flood relief in Assam, Bihar and West Bengal in September 2002, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal flood relief in October 2003, Assam flood relief in May 2004, and the West Bengal tornado relief in July 2004, to mention just a few. In July 1999 the Mission contributed to the Prime Minister's National Defence Fund for helping the Kargil war victims by handing over two demand drafts amounting to Rs. 10 lakhs to the Prime Minister. It also favourably considered the sons of the war martyrs for admission into its schools for free education. Yearly winter relief is also taken up by the Mission when warm garments are distributed among the poor and needy in the different cold regions of India.

Relief Services in Foreign Countries

The Ramakrishna Mission Relief and Rehabilitation services have not been confined to India alone. Whenever occasions arose, relief services were extended to her neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Primary relief work was extended to Russia also in 1992. Brief accounts of these relief services are presented below.

East Pakistan Migrant Relief: We have already mentioned about the East Pakistan Refugee Relief in 1945-50. But even more serious and wide-spread

were the later troubles in East Pakistan which suddenly flared up in January 1964. A greater number of men, women, and children crossed the borders in a frenzied condition for succour and safety. This time also the Mission could not but respond to the urgent call for relief. Near the Indo-East Pakistan border, five relief centres were opened one after the other — namely at Gede, Petrapole, Banpur, Hingalganj in West Bengal, and Harimura in Assam. The Mission centre at Katihar (Bihar) also did some rehabilitation work in the Purnea district. In due course, by the middle of May, the Mission extended its relief work within the transit camp in Krud (M.P). Relief was given under the following headings: a) Gratuitous Relief, b) Medical Relief, and c) Collectional and Cultural Contributions.[29]

Relief and Rehabilitation Services in Bangladesh: Since the inception of Bangladesh in 1971, primary relief as well as rehabilitation services are being conducted almost every year through our branch centres in the country. A typical Report of the Ramakrishna Mission Relief work during 1969-75 is reproduced below as an illustration:

> In Bangladesh, the relief work was continued this year also: a) construction of houses, b) distribution of milk powder and clothing, c) medical assistance, d) library, e) students' home, f) giving of text books to needy students and payment of their examination fees, etc. These were the modes of relief there. The Math and the Mission centres at Dhaka, Narayanganj, Bagerhat, Barisal, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Sylhet, Habiganj, Mymensingh, and Baliati carried on these works. Approximately 3,09,430 people of 77,872 families received relief of various kinds.[30]

Earthquake Relief in Nepal: In 1980, there was a major earthquake in Nepal which caused untold suffering to innumerable poor people living in high altitudes. The Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow, rushed truck loads of primary relief materials notwithstanding disrupted road links and perilous terrain. Food, clothes, blankets, utensils, etc. were distributed among the quake-affected people till normalcy was restored.

Relief Work in Sri Lanka: In 1983, due to clashes between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, a large number of Sri Lankan people, mostly of

Indian origin, started fleeing the country and reached the Indian soil by boat. The Ramakrishna Mission, through its branch centre at T. Nagar, Madras, continued this refugee relief work for several years till the refugees were settled. Besides this, there were several other relief and rehabilitation activities as well. For instance, 27 low cost houses, each with 2 rooms, a well, and a lavatory were erected and handed over free to the sanitary workers of Batticaloa region in commemoration of the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's visit to Ceylon on January 15, 1897. The cost of the project was 7.5 lakhs Indian rupees, which was sent from Headquarters and the work was executed through our Batticaloa centre in Sri Lanka.

Distress Relief in Moscow: In 1992 when there was great political and economic instability in the USSR, the Moscow centre of the Ramakrishna Mission requested the Headquarters at Belur Math to explore whether some primary relief measures could be undertaken for the distressed sisters and brothers in and around Moscow. In response to the request, requisite permission was obtained from the concerned Ministries of India as well as the Russian Consulate. It was decided that nearly 10 tons of dry food materials comprising 6,000 tins of baby food (weighing 3,000 kilograms), 300 tins of milk powder (3,000 kilograms), and 29 bags of sugar (2,900 kilograms) would be sent by air to Moscow for immediate distribution among the distressed Russians. M/S Air India Ltd. graciously accorded free air transport of the entire consignment from Calcutta to Moscow in two instalments. About 1,000 people were benefited and the expenditure was nearly Rs. 7 lakhs. The Russian people acknowledged the gift with grateful thanks, and the news was circulated over the local media there.

Current Events

Thus we have seen that over the past century, the Mission has rushed into relief services to its fullest capacity wherever and whenever it was warranted. The trend still continues. Recently the Mission stepped into a massive relief and rehabilitation programme for tsunami victims. Along with this, several other relief works on smaller scale also were undertaken, some of which are being highlighted here as current events.

Tsunami Relief: On 26 December 2004, an earthquake hit the west coast of Sumatra and the Andaman Islands. This created a deadly tsunami devastating some of the coastal regions of Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka. The 'killer waves' consumed around 1.5 lakhs of lives. It was one of the worst catastrophes ever recorded. Within a few hours of the disaster, the monks of the Mission, along with the volunteers, swiftly moved relief items to the victims of the worst hit areas. The Mission organized this relief mainly through its centres in Madras, Port Blair, and Colombo. Cooked food, dry food packets, baby food, clothing, utensils and medical aid were distributed among the needy as primary relief. Around 90,000 people were the beneficiaries of the primary relief conducted by the Madras and Port Blair centres. At a camp in the Government Senior Secondary School at Hadoo in the Little Andaman, 25,000 people were being fed thrice daily. More than 80,000 victims benefited from the primary relief conducted by the Colombo centre, in collaboration with its centre in Batticaloa. Till now (July 2005) this primary relief work has cost the Mission more than rupees 1.5 crores. Alongside this primary relief, the Mission has now stepped into the rehabilitation phase or the work. Madras, Kalady and Batticaloa centres have been distributing durable fibreglass boats/catamarans, fishing nets, etc. to the fisher-folk, the worst sufferers in this disaster. Till June 2005, in all 403 boats were distributed. The Batticaloa centre handed over a vessel costing Rs. 2,75,000 to the suffering community there for passenger launch service. The Mission has undertaken to construct 210 houses, 3 community halls, 1 park, 20 toilets, and a school-cum-shelter house in Tamil Nadu. In Sri Lanka, the Batticaloa centre would construct 114 houses in different places. The Port Blair Centre distributed school uniforms, school bags, text books, drawing books, note books, geometry boxes, pens and several other stationery items to 1881 students of 11 schools in South Andaman and Little Andaman. Efforts are also being made to rehabilitate children orphaned by the disaster in Andaman Islands. This relief work is still going on, and is estimated to cost more than rupees 15 crores.

Flood Relief in Maharashtra and Gujarat: Excessive rainfall in Western India in July 2005 caused heavy damage to property and loss of many lives in the affected areas. Hundreds of villages were inundated displacing a large number of families. The Mission conducted primary relief work through its centres in Bombay, Pune, and Vadodara.

Jammu and Kashmir Earthquake Relief: Kashmir, the subcontinent's sylvan paradise, was convulsed by an earthquake that tore through the three nations early on Saturday, 8 October 2005. The minute-long quake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale reduced the region to ruins. There were death and damage everywhere. On the Indian side of LOC, more than 1,400 died, thousands were injured and many rendered homeless. The Ramakrishna Mission, through its centre at Jammu, sent primary relief to the victims. It distributed flour, mustard oil, ghee, salt, biscuits, milk powder, blankets, foam mattresses, tents with bamboos, plastic sheets, soap, lanterns, petromaxes, etc. to 1778 affected families in 40 villages in Poonch district.

Concluding Comments

The relief services of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, from their very humble beginning in the last century, gradually assumed massive dimensions over the past few decades. It should be borne in mind that these relief services are not merely acts of charity but a specific method of spiritual practice as initiated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. It is the worship of God in the form of suffering beings without any distinction whatsoever. Since it provides a wonderful opportunity to exercise one's power of benevolence over other fellow beings and thus become blessed, more and more people should actively participate in the relief activities with a view to transforming this world of ours into a better place.

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APPENDIX A-1

Primary relief work done by Ramakrishna Mission since its inception

Decade	Year	Name of the place	Types of relief work done
1st	1897-1907	Bengal (East & West)	Famine, Plague, Earthquake
		Uttar Pradesh (Kishengarh)	Famine
		Tripura	Famine
		Bihar (Bhagalpur)	Flood, Plague
		Himachal Pradesh	Earthquake
2nd	1907-1917	Bengal (East & West)	Famine, Flood
		Assam (Cachar)	Famine, Flood
		Orissa (Balasore, Puri)	Famine, Fire
		Tripura and Uttar Pradesh	Flood, Medical
		Bihar (Bhagalpur)	Medical
3rd	1917-1927	Bengal (East & West)	Cyclone, Famine, Flood, Fire, Medical
		Orissa (Ganjam, Puri, Balasore, Cuttack)	Cyclone, Famine, Flood, Fire, Medical
		Tripura and Bihar	Famine, Flood, Fire, Medical
		Uttar Pradesh and Assam	Flood, Fire, Medical
		Burma and British Malabar	Flood
		Tamil Nadu & Kerala	Flood
		Punjab	Medical
		Bombay	Flood
4th	1927-1937	Bengal (East & West)	Cyclone, Famine, Flood, Fire, Medical, Riot
		Tamil Nadu	Cyclone
		Andhra Pradesh	Cyclone

Decade	Year	Name of the place	Types of relief work done
4th	1927-1937	Assam, Orissa	Flood, Fire
		Uttar Pradesh	Flood, Fire, Kumbha Mela
		Burma	Flood, Earthquake
		Bihar	Fire, Earthquake
5th	1937-1947	Bengal (East & West)	Cyclone, Famine, Flood, Fire, Medical, Refugee
		Orissa	Cyclone, Flood, Fire
		Malabar, Backerganj	Cyclone
		Bihar	Famine, Fire, Medical, Riot
		Gujarat	Flood
		Assam	Flood, Refugee, Riot
		Tripura	Riot
		Uttar Pradesh (Almora)	Medical
6th	1947-1957	Andhra Pradesh	Cyclone, Flood
		Tamil Nadu	Cyclone, Flood, Riot
		Bihar	Famine, Flood, Medical, Riot
		West Bengal	Famine, Flood, Fire, Medical
		Maharashtra	Famine
		Bangladesh (East Pakistan)	Flood, Medical, Riot
		Assam	Flood, Medical, Earthquake
		Orissa, Tamil Nadu	Flood
		Gujarat	Flood
		Uttar Pradesh	Flood, Kumbha Mela
		Tripura	Medical, Riot

Decade	Year	Name of the place	Types of relief work done
7th	1957-1967	Tamil Nadu	Cyclone, Flood, Riot
		Bihar	Drought, Medical, Distress
		Uttar Pradesh, Punjab	Drought
		Andhra Pradesh	Flood
		Assam	Flood
		West Bengal	Flood, Fire, Medical
		Gujarat	Flood, Earthquake
		Orissa	Flood
		Sri Lanka	Flood, Riot
		Tripura	Flood
		Bangladesh (Dhaka)	Scarcity
		Jammu and Kashmir	Distress
8th	1967-1977	Orissa	Cyclone, Drought, Flood, Fire
		Andhra Pradesh	Cyclone
		West Bengal	Cyclone, Drought, Flood, Medical, Refugee, Earthquake, Scarcity
		Gujarat	Cyclone
		Uttar Pradesh	Drought, Medical
		Bihar	Drought, Flood, Riot, Cheap Canteen
		Maharashtra	Drought
		Gujarat	Drought, Flood
		Karnataka	Drought
		Delhi	Flood
		Assam	Flood, Medical, Riot
		Tamil Nadu	Flood
		Tripura	Flood
		Madhya Pradesh	Flood

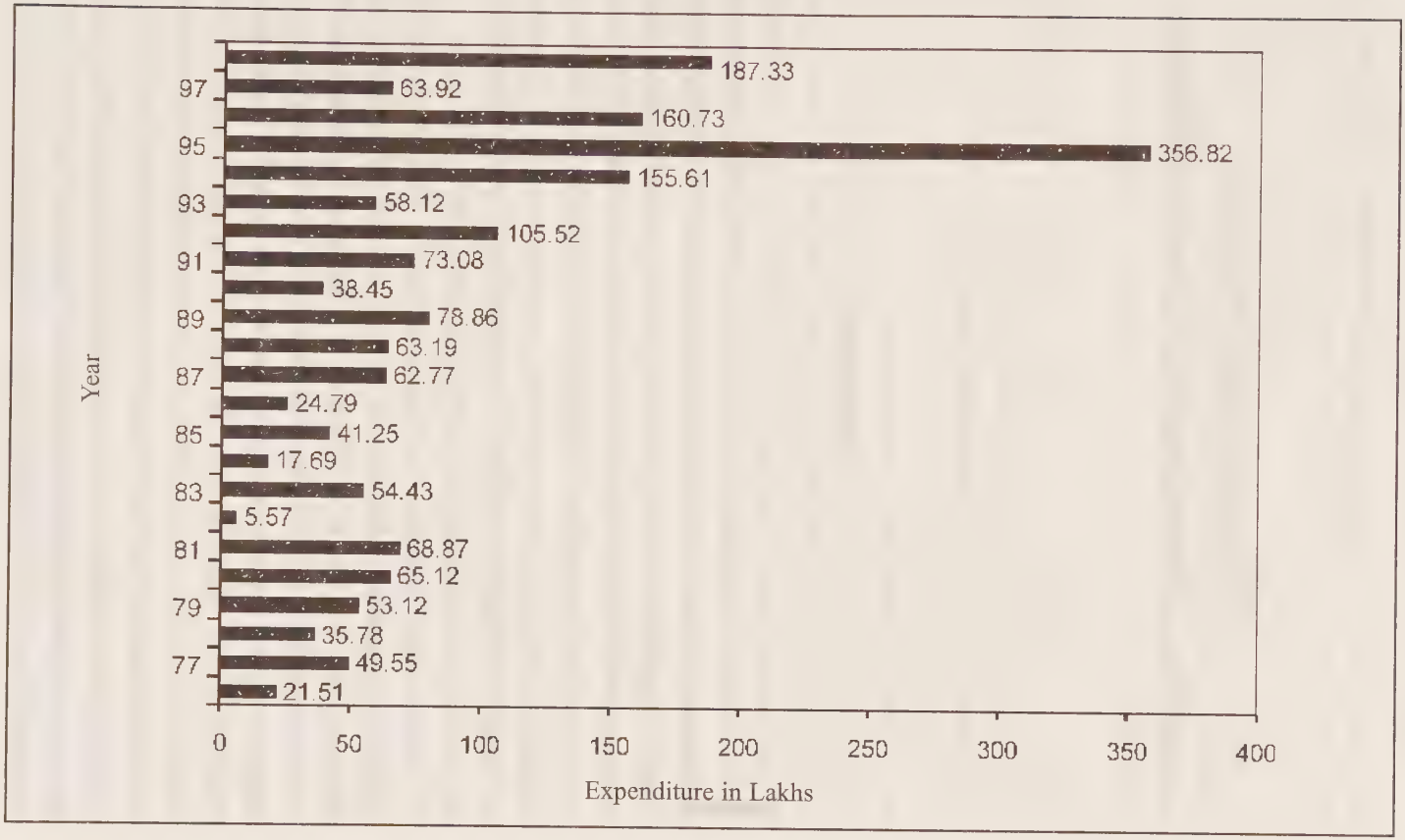
Decade	Year	Name of the place	Types of relief work done
9th	1977-1987	Andhra Pradesh	Cyclone, Flood, Fire
		Tamil Nadu	Cyclone, Drought, Fire, Refugee
		West Bengal	Cyclone, Drought, Flood, Medical, Dandakaranya, Deserter, Disturbance, Winter and Distress
		Orissa	Cyclone, Flood
		Meghalaya	Cyclone, Flood, Disturbance
		Assam	Cyclone, Flood, Disturbance, Earthquake
		Gujarat	Cyclone, Drought, Flood
		Rajasthan	Drought, Flood, Winter
		Bihar	Drought, Flood, Riot
		Maharashtra	Drought, Flood, Riot
		Karnataka	Drought
		Uttar Pradesh	Flood, Medical
		New Delhi	Flood, Disturbance
		Tripura	Flood, Chakma Refugee, Disturbance
		Bangladesh	Flood, Cyclone
		Arunachal Pradesh	Fire
		Nepal	Earthquake
10th	1987-1997	West Bengal	Cyclone, Flood, Fire, Medical, Disturbance, Distress, Tornado, Winter
		Orissa	Cyclone, Drought, Flood, Fire, Medical
		Meghalaya	Cyclone, Flood, Fire, Disturbance, Distress
		Bangladesh	Cyclone, Flood, Disturbance, Tornado
		Andhra Pradesh	Cyclone, Flood, Fire
		Gujarat	Cyclone, Drought, Flood, Distress, Plague
		Tamil Nadu	Cyclone, Flood, Refugee

Decade	Year	Name of the place	Types of relief work done
10th	1987-1997	Maharashtra	Drought, Flood, Disturbance, Earthquake
		Rajasthan	Drought, Flood, Distress
		Bihar	Drought, Flood, Fire, Distress, Epidemic, Earthquake (Munger)
		Assam	Flood, Disturbance, Distress
		New Delhi	Flood
		Tripura	Flood
		Punjab and Haryana	Flood
		Uttar Pradesh	Flood, Earthquake (Uttar Kashi)
		Sri Lanka	Flood, Refugee, Distress
		Arunachal Pradesh	Fire, Distress
		Kerala	Distress
		Moscow	Distress
		Madhya Pradesh	Epidemic
11th	1997-Nov 2005	Andhra Pradesh	Cyclone, Fire, Flood, Winter, Distress
		West Bengal	Cyclone, Flood, Fire, Medical, Distress, Tornado, Winter Disturbance, Storm
		Bangladesh	Cyclone, Flood, Distress, Fire
		Gujarat	Drought, Flood, Distress, Earthquake, Winter
		Madras	Flood
		Orissa	Flood, Fire, Tornado, Winter, Cyclone, Distress
		Assam	Medical, Refugee, Fire, Flood, Winter, Riot, Distress
		Madhya Pradesh	Earthquake (Jabalpur), Winter
		Bihar	Winter, Medical, Flood, Fire, Distress
		Uttar Pradesh	Fire, Earthquake, Flood, Distress, Winter
		Rajasthan	Drought

Decade	Year	Name of the place	Types of relief work done
11th	1997- Nov 2005	Tripura	Disturbance, Riot, Distress
		Tamil Nadu	Drought, Distress, Fire, Flood, Tsunami
		Arunachal Pradesh	Fire, Winter, Distress
		Western India	Drought
		Fiji	Disturbance
		Kerala	Disturbance, Tsunami
		Jharkhand	Fire, Winter, Distress, Hailstrom
		Karnataka	Drought, Winter, Distress
		Chandigarh	Winter
		Chhattisgarh	Distress, Winter
		Maharashtra	Distress, Drought, Flood
		Jammu	Distress, Earthquake
		Uttaranchal	Distress
		Port Blair	Tsunami
		Sri Lanka	Tsunami
		Meghalaya	Fire, Distress

APPENDIX A-2

Summary of Primary Relief Expenditure from 1975–76 till 1997- 98



Ramakrishna Mission and the Advancement of Indian Women

DR. SUMITA ROY

Introduction

It appears extremely significant at the beginning of this 21st century to take stock of the advancement of Indian women *vis-à-vis* the Ramakrishna Movement spanning the last hundred years and more, a century which has witnessed unprecedented changes in the position, role, and responsibilities of women not only in India but also in the wider global context. What seems most crucial for this centenary perspective is identifying and analyzing the Ramakrishna Mission's efforts to imbue, with a dominant, living spirituality, the women's struggle for 'equality', in addition to its social, cultural, and other achievements keeping in view their requirements.

While most of the other movements devoted solely to the advancement/uplift/empowerment/emancipation of women — the so-called weaker, marginalized section of humanity — took radical, often antagonistic channels to achieve their ends, and were, therefore, sooner or later bogged down by problems of irrational rebelliousness or exclusivism, the labour of the Ramakrishna Movement in this field has been characterized by a more or less balanced perspective. In fact, what could be more equal than equality at the level of the spirit which does not have its foundation on gender distinctions! The role of the Ramakrishna Mission in the emergence of a unique spiritual landscape that gives women centrality provides possibly the most meaningful definition of equality, perceiving which we find permanent cures to the various

ramifications of the disease of inequality — oppression, exploitation, and fossilized orthodoxy, which demand conformity at the price of retarding the creativity and advancement of women.

In addition, the basic inconsistencies inherent in the demands for 'equality' and the cry for the reversal or merging of gender roles can also be sorted out in an environment which respects and establishes the individual identity of women instead of treating them as appendages to men in a predominantly patriarchal set-up.

The Ramakrishna Mission's crusade in these areas pertaining to women's welfare over the last hundred years is beginning to show a decisive impact on improving the status of women in those groups, families, and communities that have come into the fold of the Movement. It can certainly be hoped that the future will herald a wider dissemination of the ideas and ideals of the Movement in order that more people become influenced by it, and the advancement of women marches ahead with rapid strides, transcending anomalies and imbalances.

Since the 21st century perspective is a time for stock-taking as well as looking at future possibilities, the present review of the role of the Ramakrishna Mission in the last hundred years in the field of women's advancement needs to begin much before the year 1897 — to survey the time which structured the ideals and environment on which the Mission has its foundation.

The Spiritualization of the Feminine in the Ramakrishna Movement — Inspiring Instances

What appears to the sceptical mind as a series of coincidences is to a devotee links in the chain of divine design. From this point of view we can variously interpret the fact that women have played a major role right from the early stages of the Ramakrishna Movement and continue to do so today in a more specialized form through their women's wing, Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission.

To begin with, Ramakrishna showed positive feminine qualities of love and maternal affection, especially obvious in the case of those who belonged to the inner circle. Vivekananda said that Ramakrishna alone knew how to love, and that the love of worldly people is a selfish love. A valuable lesson

can be learnt from this all-encompassing love of the Master. Also, as a unique achievement of his *sādhanā*, Sita, the model of feminine grace and purity, bequeathed her smile to him.

Next, the Indian spiritual resurgence owes Ramakrishna a debt of gratitude for bringing new breath and novelty to the concept of God as Mother. In an ethos which condemned women to silent suffering or at best looked upon them as objects of pleasure, the currency and centrality given to Kali is very significant. Ramakrishna chose Kali instead of the numerous other female deities who crowd the Indian pantheon probably because the paradox of Mother Kali's terrifying and benign aspects found the right reflection in the experiences of his age. The motherhood of God was the essential core of his message, and in looking upon all women, even the so-called disreputable ones, as the embodied form of the Blissful Mother, he suggested a corrective to the ills of a society which as a rule accorded an inferior status to women.

Then we have Totapuri's initial rejection and later dramatic acceptance of 'Ramakrishna's Mother'. According to Swami Saradananda, Totapuri left a few days after accepting the Divine Mother. Similarly, Vivekananda's early scepticism followed by his total conversion to the Master's Mother-madness is a valuable pointer to the future models of women and their role.

Also, Ramakrishna's *līlā-kṣetra*, the hallowed precincts of the Dakshineswar temple where he unfolded his unique play, was surprisingly conceived and executed by a very dynamic woman, Rani Rasmani. Not often in the history of this wonderful architectural and spiritual confluence is the name of her husband, the Raja, heard, possibly because he had departed from his mortal frame before the idea of the temple took shape. A study of the Rani's life reveals how eminently suitable she was for this noble task and how inspiring were her exceptional talents which gave her the blessing of being the instrument for providing Ramakrishna with the appropriate laboratory for his spiritual experiments.

Another matter of great significance is that though the family deity of the Rani was Rama, she dreamt that she was to build a temple and install Goddess Kali.

This sanctifying of woman as Mother, therefore, lies at the root of the Mission's objectives. In this the life of Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, is primary. From her tender childhood years she was filled with maternal affection for the

suffering humanity as is indicated in numerous incidents such as her fanning the food for the famished so that they could eat it quickly. Throughout her life Holy Mother was a pillar of strength and spiritual solace, silent but eloquent, modest yet decisive about what was essential. At various times Sri Ramakrishna spoke of her as Sarasvati, Sita, Radha, and as 'my Shakti'.

Ramakrishna's worship of his wife on the auspicious occasion of the Shodashi Puja seems in retrospect an event of extraordinary significance. It is also an object lesson for all those who are wont to treat their wives as procreative machines or robots for smooth housekeeping. His long course of educating her, so that she would carry forward his mission after his departure from the world, is an effective model for bringing awareness to the society about the potential of women.

The far-ranging significance of the Holy Mother's life-rhythms is evident today as never before. Quoting her well-known 'formula' for a meaningful life — 'If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others', and 'Learn to make the whole world your own' — the eminent writer Kenneth Walker says, rightly:

> In these few simple words she was warning [us] against that superficial egoism which separates us one from another and was stressing...the underlying unity of all mankind, a unity in which there is no room for such words as 'yours' and 'mine', and no place for strangers.[1]

One can add, especially no place for privilege and gender biases.

Both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, the disciple who carried his Master's message far and wide, were much inspired by their mothers. The exceptional lives of these blessed ladies who had the privilege of bringing such remarkable sons into this world and influencing their lives deeply makes engrossing reading and provides positive directions for the advancement of women. Ramakrishna, for instance, said:

> My mother was the personification of rectitude and gentleness. She did not know much about the ways of the world; innocent of the art of concealment, she would say what was in her mind. People loved her for her openheartedness.[2]

Then there were the women disciples of Ramakrishna: Gauri-Ma, Golap-Ma, Yogin-Ma, and others. They individually and collectively serve as models

for lay women. They all overcame personal tragedies and, with the support provided by the Master, led exalted spiritual lives.

Vivekananda, in his turn, chose Margaret Noble and gave her the name Nivedita, 'the Dedicated', in order to identify the dominant virtue which guides a woman. He handed over to her the task of making the status of Indian women on par with those of the best he had seen in the West. They had a great influence on his mind. A recent publication from Sri Sarada Math gives inspiring sketches of *Western Women in the Footsteps of Vivekananda*, where glimpses of their greatness and relevance to Indian women's advancement are evident.

Another instance of giving respect to women in order to build up the self-confidence of those labouring under long ages of neglect is Ramakrishna's acceptance of his first alms from Dhani, a low caste woman, after his sacred thread ceremony:

> During the ceremony of investiture he shocked his relatives by accepting a meal cooked by his nurse, a shudra woman.... The woman had piety and religious sincerity, and these were more important to the boy than the conventions of society.[3]

Most significant of all is Ramakrishna's veneration of a woman, Bhairavi Brahmani, as his guru at a crucial stage of his *sādhanā*, and his purification of tantric doctrines which had over the ages become progressively obscure and puerile, if not obscene and vulgar.

From the beginning of his life Ramakrishna looked upon women as Shakti, the power of the Mother. During the long years of his *sādhanā*, he once assumed the garb of a woman, and this, incidentally, shows how much more open and effective women are as actualizing vehicles of potential spirituality. His teachings abound in injunctions which use women as metaphors, as for instance the fisherwoman and the smell of fish, the friend who steals thread and is asked to dance with both her hands raised, and many more. In fact, 'woman' is psychology and not biology for the Master. The word 'woman' in the expression 'woman and gold' represented the principle of lust, the transcendence of which is crucial for the *sādhanā* of both men and women.

As early as in his Kamarpukur days when he was in his teens Ramakrishna told a neighbouring gentleman, Durgadas Pyne, a strict advocate of the purdah system, 'that by education and devotion alone could the chastity of women be

preserved, not by confining them within a zenana.' Such a progressive attitude at that time was as rare as it was novel.

As a metaphor for unattached life in the world Ramakrishna used the example of a maid servant: 'A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village.'[4]

Then in a parable about a couple who renounced the world he makes the woman attain the higher state of discrimination: the story titled 'Equal Vision is the First and Last Sign of Renunciation' is as follows:

> A husband and wife renounced the world and together undertook a pilgrimage to various holy shrines. Once they were walking along a road, the husband, being a little ahead of the wife, saw a piece of diamond on the road. Immediately he began to scratch the ground to hide the diamond in it, thinking that if his wife saw it perchance she might be moved to avarice, and thus lose the merits of renunciation. While he was thus scratching the ground, the wife came up and asked him what he was doing. He gave her, in an apologetic tone, an evasive reply. She, however, finding out the diamond and reading his thoughts remarked, 'Why did you leave the world if you still feel the distinction between the diamond and dust?'[5]

An apparently simple tale, this gives a complete view of human relationships and the inner dimensions of existence, a memorable and moving lesson to all who really want to advance in the inward journey.

Instances of Ramakrishna's advice to women abound, but it is unfortunate that there was none like 'M' to present posterity with a stenographic record of those illuminating discourses.

Then, moving away from the Indian scene, Vivekananda's experiences in the West showed him that women there expected chivalrous courtesies from men and this had the inherent conditioning behind it that women were the weaker sex. On one occasion he told some Western women that it was their mistake to think that they were weak. Vivekananda wanted them to get over this idea of inferiority. He was an advocate of giving total freedom and autonomy to women and not making decisions for them. He said that they knew their own problems best and could therefore solve them more effectively on their own. This was one of the major reasons Sri Sarada Math came into existence.

Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission: A New Channel for Women's Advancement

Although Sri Sarada Math (a monastic order for women) is an entirely separate and independent organization, its founding in 1954 opened a new chapter in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement. It gave recognition to the divinity in women as the basic principle for their participation in the various roles society expects them to play. This was Vivekananda's ideal articulated explicitly as early as 1895, but the conditions of the age were not propitious enough to give scope for its concretization, and the dream of Swamiji had to wait for over fifty years to be fulfilled. Since then Sri Sarada Math has made major strides in infusing new breath into the formidable task of the advancement of women in various ways.

Taking into account the evolution of women from the early Vedic times to the present, Sri Sarada Math has devoted itself over the years to the educational, cultural, social, and spiritual progress of women in order to afford them scope for self-development, self-expression, and maturity in thought and action.

Sri Sarada Math's diverse and multifaceted undertakings are aimed towards the awakening of a vibrant sense of the inner strength of women. The activities of the various branches of Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission in India and abroad are geared toward a harmonious all-round development of the personality of women — physical, intellectual, ethical, and spiritual. It has a number of educational institutions — schools and colleges — for propagating Swami Vivekananda's ideal of education as the manifestation of the perfection inherent in human beings. Classes in religion and philosophy for women, free schools for the needy, schools for tribal girls, and Bāla Mandirs for teaching children about Indian history, culture, and traditions, training in yogāsanas, outdoor games, music, elocution, dramatics, and other similar programmes are producing excellent results.

The charitable activities of Sri Sarada Math include maternity hospitals, homoeopathic hospitals, libraries and reading rooms, hostels for students, small-scale relief work, giving clothes, medicine and financial aid to the helpless, etc. Its social welfare measures include literacy classes, work experience classes such as preparation of detergents, weaving, tailoring, knitting,

drawing, sewing, embroidery, and training in health and hygiene, mainly for village women.

Regular discourses and lecture tours in and outside India by the sannyāsinis who form the core inspiration behind all the achievements of Sri Sarada Math is another step in the right direction.

Sri Sarada Math's journals *Samvit* (in English) and *Nibodhata* (in Bengali) give a forum for self-expression to women in addition to giving a positive evolution to their thought. The publication of some important volumes over the years has also served a useful purpose.

Finally, the shrine rooms of Sri Sarada Math centres scattered all over the country, where like-minded women gather along with the nuns and participate in daily worship as well as special celebrations, provide a haven of peace and facilities for inward growth. They are sanctuaries of inspiration and strength, places which afford the joys of solitude without inflicting the pain of loneliness. The monastic and the laity are the two wings for the effective growth of spirituality in a comprehensive way. The spiritualization of the householder's life is the topic discussed in the next article.

The Future of Women's Advancement Work

It needs to be stressed that if more and more women are brought into the fold of the activities of Sri Sarada Math and made to make the best of all their numerous opportunities, the advancement of women will acquire an added dimension.

Recognizing the inherent excellence and innate dignity of all human beings — both men and women — is the first step in demolishing the superficially imposed artificial barriers such as strong/weak, capable/incapable, superior/inferior, pure/impure, which have become the parameters for defining genders. Equality should imply complementarity and not competitive aggressiveness which aims to subordinate or wipe the opponent out of existence. Progress on these lines is the true sign of a society which affords the right opportunities for the advancement of women.

Advancement and emancipation are states which also invest women with a tremendous responsibility: to establish a peaceful and progressive social order based on the tenets of non-violence; to come to the forefront and parti-

cipate meaningfully in the changing economic scene; to make positive and sizeable contributions to the swiftly changing value structure; to infuse individual relations with a humanistic attitude, and many more equally significant tasks.

The future advancement of women can be visualized as moving ahead through vital undertakings such as the pursuit of truth with a scientific attitude of mind, the cultivation of their natural talents instead of dissipating energy in senseless tasks and artificially conditioned needs, creating a sense of joy and pride by emulating the virtues which are embedded in women by nature — such as sensitivity, concern, consideration, affection, selfless service, etc. All these are necessary for the proper evolution of women.

Renunciation and sacrifice are at the root of liberation whether secular or sacred. Women have the living ideal in the lives of the sannyāsinis of Sri Sarada Math today even if they feel a sense of regret that the earlier personalities are no longer physically present to serve as inspiration. Contact with these exceptional women who have renounced the world but are living in it for the benefit of others is an effective way for women to mould their lives. When the majority of women will have striven to step onto the path laid out by them, they will have scaled the principle of achievement in the field of women's advancement. We are hopeful that in the next hundred years an undreamed-of success will have been achieved in this area. The Ramakrishna-Sarada-Vivekananda-Vedanta Movement undoubtedly has tremendous potential in this regard.

References

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2 *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda [Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1942], 3.

3 Ibid., 5.

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Sri Ramakrishna and the Spiritualization of Householder's Life

AASHA REDDY

THE FOUNDATION OF human society is the recognition of a definite relationship between a man and a woman as husband and wife. It is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* that at the dawn of human civilization, there was no sanctity in the relationship between men and women. They could change their partners at will. Seeing the evil consequences of such a promiscuous state of affairs, a *rishi* named Shvetaketu is supposed to have formalized the system of marriage. It is evident from the *Ṛg-Veda* that by the Vedic period, the institution of marriage had already been well established. There is one particular hymn in the *Ṛg-Veda* (10. 85) which deals with the marriage ritual and the code of conduct to be followed by a married couple. It is perhaps the oldest written document available in human history institutionalizing the marriage system.

The Vedic marriage is a holy sacrament. The ceremony commences with the ritual of *kanyādāna* in which the father of the bride offers the hand of his daughter to the bridegroom, who accepts it with a promise: *dharmeṣa, artheṣa, kāmeṣa na athisarāmi*. It means 'I will not transgress the prescribed bounds in the pursuit of *dharma* (righteous living), of *artha* (wealth), and of *kāma* (satisfaction of desires).' The groom then takes the bride's hand in his with the words: 'May your entry into my house be most auspicious, bringing blessings to the entire household including the domestic birds and animals. May you be the sharer of my pleasures, the mistress of my household. May we reach old age together amidst sons and grandsons.' The ceremony concludes with a prayer

offered by the couple to the gods to join their hearts and bind them close together.[1] This union in body and mind makes them companions in the journey towards God, supporting and helping each other in the realization of this goal, and resolving any conflict in this process by mutual love, respect, and understanding. In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

> In that race (the Aryan race of India), men and women were priests... or co-religionists as the Vedas call them. There every family had its hearth or altar on which, at the time of the wedding, the marriage fire was kindled, which was kept alive until either spouse died, when the funeral pile was lighted from its spark. There man and wife together offered their sacrifices, and this idea was carried so far that a man could not even pray alone, because it was held that he was only half a being....[2]

An important aspect of married life was the perpetuation of the race, and even this had to be done with an attitude of prayer. According to Manu, every child not born through prayer is illegitimate.

The householder was looked upon as the pillar of society. It was his responsibility to engage himself in the pursuit of wealth and to use that wealth for the welfare of his family and society. Swami Ranganathananda, in his lecture on *Grihastha Dharma*, quotes the *Manu Smṛti*, which says: 'The *grihastha ashrama* is the greatest among the ashramas because it is only the *grihastha* who provides food and education to the people of the other three ashramas. All this had to be done by the householder without desire for the fruits of his actions and with a sense of devotion and self-surrender to God. As a result, every action of his became divinized.'[3]

With the passage of time, these ideals were forgotten. Marriage became a mere ritual with neither the bride nor the bridegroom even aware of the meaning of the vows and promises made. Householders began to feel alienated from the ideals of the *grihastha ashrama*, which emphasizes self-control, detachment, self-surrender, and God-realization as the ultimate goal of life. They left these higher ideals to sannyāsis because they felt that these ideals were unattainable in family life. They resigned themselves to leading mundane lives with no higher purpose.

The need of the hour was for the advent of a phenomenon which would be a perfect blend of the Vedic ideals of both the *grihastha* and sannyāsa

ashramas. The Hindu ideal of spirituality has always been the twin principles of Shiva and Shakti, Rama and Sita, Vishnu and Lakshmi, symbolizing a single mind with two bodies. It was in this sacred tradition that Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi incarnated themselves on this earth to uphold once again the grand ideals of a dharmic way of life leading to God-realization.

Most manifestations of these divine twin principles have been either mythological or semi-historical. It can be said without any fear of exaggeration that Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi are unique in this respect, because their manifestation has been within easy reach of living memory and has been fully documented.

Both of them were born to poor but devout parents.Their childhood was spent in an environment of which God was the centre and everything they did was His worship. Their marriage itself was, to say the least, an extraordinary event. He was a young man of twenty-three years and she a mere child of about five. The unusual nature of his *sādhanā* had led people to believe that he was of unsound mind. They thought that marriage would make him normal. Sri Ramakrishna's family was too poor to afford money for a bride, a custom prevalent in Bengal at that time. His mother and brother became worried. One day, noticing this, he declared in a semi-conscious state: 'Why are you running here and there for a bride for me? She is earmarked for me in the house of Ramachandra Mukherjee in Jayarambati.' Even though Sarada was only a little girl of five years, the marriage was performed.

The question which arises in one's mind is why did Sri Ramakrishna marry at all? We must remember here that everything he did in his life had a meaning and purpose and was part of his divine *līlā*. Sri Ramakrishna did not marry out of compulsion. He married willingly, even indicating who his life companion would be. Like all acts of his life, even this was performed for the good of all. By taking upon himself the duties and responsibilities of a householder, he showed us how the higher ideals of married life can be achieved, so that we may practise at least 'one-sixteenth' of what he practised. Swami Saradananda says, 'We, therefore, say that it was for you (householders) alone that this wonderful incarnation of the age married, lived a life with no physical relationship for even a single day with his wife, and at the same time maintained a sweet and loving attitude towards her all through his life.'[4]

At the end of his *sādhanā*, Sri Ramakrishna performed the Shodashi Puja of the Divine Mother in the person of his wife and offered all the fruits of his *sādhanā* at her feet. She was now not only his life companion but also his spiritual counterpart. Sri Sarada Devi's relationship with Sri Ramakrishna was also equally spiritual and divine. They had become divine parents to all spiritual seekers and are worshipped in millions of homes the world over.

Even though Sri Ramakrishna spent most of his time in a God-intoxicated mood, he was never unmindful of the feelings of his wife. He always showed deep concern for her. In the words of Holy Mother herself:

> How kind was the Master's behaviour to me! He never spoke a single word that could hurt me. One day at Dakshineswar I carried his food to his room and, thinking it was Lakshmi (his niece), he said, 'Shut the door as you go out', addressing me familiarly as 'tui' (used only when speaking to juniors or servants). I replied 'All right'. Hearing my voice, he was startled and cried: 'Oh, it is you! I thought it was Lakshmi. Please don't mind.' I answered, 'What does it matter?' He never showed any disrespect towards me, and he was always most considerate of my welfare.[5]

Their relationship was full of such instances of thoughtfulness, mutual respect, and deep sensitivity to each other's feelings.

Sri Ramakrishna was born when his mother Chandramani Devi was already forty-five years old, and Sri Ramakrishna was her favourite child. He lost his father, Kshudiram, at the tender age of seven. This loss drew him even closer to his mother towards whom he developed a protective attitude which lasted throughout her life.

Once when he visited Vrindavan on a piligrimage, he was so captivated by the natural beauty of the place and the devotion of Ganga Mata, an aged and pious lady of great austerity, that he decided to settle down there. It was only the thought of his mother that drew him back to Dakshineswar. Sri Sarada Devi too used to look after the needs of her mother-in-law with great care and devotion. It is the lack of this kind of concern for aged parents today which has led to the culture of Old People's Homes, so alien to the Indian ethos.

Sri Ramakrishna had a number of young disciples — Naren, Rakhal, Latu, Yogen, and others — who used to visit him very often at Dakshineswar.

The Holy Mother would cook for these boys and feed them. The father that he was, Sri Ramakrishna kept a close watch on the spiritual practices of these boys. Knowing that overeating hinders concentration of the mind, he had instructed Holy Mother as to the number of chapatis to be served to each of them. However, it was not possible for her to follow these instructions always. Her motherly instincts would make her feed the boys more. Coming to know of this, Sri Ramakrishna would occasionally object. In her own characteristic style, the Holy Mother would tell him to confine himself to spirituality and that she was the best judge of how much the boys should eat. Sri Ramakrishna would just smile in response. Such was the sweet relationship among the members of this divine family.

A monk of the Ramakrishna Order once narrated a personal experience to us. His duty was to serve food to the monastics and devotees in the dining hall of the ashrama. It was sometimes inconvenient with some of them dropping in at irregular hours without notice, which he expressed to a senior Swami. The latter offered a simple, insightful suggestion: 'Simply remove yourself and put the Holy Mother in your place. Handle the situation as she would have done.' Seeing through the eyes of the Holy Mother changed the monk's perspective totally and no more was the situation unmanageable. How rich and meaningful our lives would be if everything we see, everything we hear and everything we do could be translated in terms of the outlook and attitude of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother! This itself is a *sādhanā* which will bless us with results beyond our dreams.

There is hardly any event, happy or unhappy, in our lives for which we cannot find a parallel in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. It is as if they have anticipated every possible experience and have demonstrated through their own example how we can respond to them. We are indeed blessed that these experiences have been recorded and have come down to us in the form of two Gospels, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*. They contain a large number of instructions and parables which illustrate the most profound truths in the simplest language possible, based upon everyday occurrences. Reading a few pages from them every day, savouring each paragraph, lingering over a statement here and there, and visualizing a mental picture of the events elevates and transports our mind to their very presence.

It is remarkable how Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother enter our lives. A Czech painter, Frank Dvorak, far away in Europe, had a vivid vision of an unknown, saintly figure and painted this on a canvas. The picture, so true to life, was years later recognized as that of Sri Ramakrishna.

Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great Bengali dramatist, lost his mother at a young age. In his youth, while seriously ill, he dreamt of a radiant motherly figure comforting him. Many, many years later, he had a glimpse of the Holy Mother and recognized in her the very woman who had comforted him in his dream.

These are mystical experiences given only to a few. However, into some of our lives Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother enter stealthily. Before we realize what is happening, they become a part and parcel of our existence. One cannot rationalize this; one can only feel their presence influencing all one's thoughts, all one's actions.

The 1994 Special Issue of *The Vedanta Kesari* was dedicated to the theme 'Practical Religion'. The feelings about God expressed by children in this issue were refreshing and thought-provoking. Such profound thoughts in their young minds touched our hearts. Seeing God in everyone, having no fear of God, confidence in His unconditional love, etc. were concepts and ideas totally unknown to most of us when we were children. We realized then as devotees and parents how deeply and subtly our children's thinking has been influenced by the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda in our homes. Our hearts were filled with joy and gratitude at the richness in the lives of these children and the amazing grace bestowed upon them at such an early age.

The teachings and parables of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother and the simple lives they led help us to relate to them so easily that we can reach out to them as if they are our very own. A housewife setting a bowl of milk to make curds is reminded that *sādhanā* is possible only when the mind is still. Smearing oil on our hands while cutting a sticky jackfruit brings to our mind the fact that the oil of divine love prevents us from getting attached to worldly life. In this manner, they constantly touch our lives in innumerable ways.

Sri Ramakrishna used to pay the greatest attention to even the smallest details of everyday life. To him, all knowledge came from God, and, therefore, no branch of learning was inferior. He even trained his young wife in all

household chores, impressing upon her the need for orderliness and attention to details. He used to say:

> One should care for one's personal things, including clothing, house etc. properly, because everything belongs to God. A great worship is going on all the time. Nothing should be neglected. One should think of God during all activities of life, such as eating, walking, moving, talking, sleeping. This is called true religion.[6]

The Holy Mother considered japa to be one of the easiest methods of *sādhanā*. She herself used to practise it and recited the name of God at least one-hundred thousand times daily. She laid great stress upon love and devotion in spiritual life and was the very embodiment of motherly love and compassion. Sister Nivedita says:

> To me it has always appeared that she is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood.... In her, one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of women may attain.... Her life is one long stillness of prayer.[7]

Perhaps the Holy Mother's greatest message to us is:

> But I tell you one thing — if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger my child; this whole world is your own.[8]

These are inspiring words. But we should not be content by merely reading them. We must strive to transform these messages into action. One simple way would be to try to live our lives the way Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother would want us to. This may appear difficult, but we have the assurance of Sri Ramakrishna that for every step we take towards God, He takes a hundred steps towards us. This sense of accomplishment with each step will keep us going. If we have not awakened to that potential within ourselves yet, now is the time.

Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi are still with us in spirit.Their divine spirit transcends time to guide all spiritual aspirants towards God-realization and inner peace. They did not make any distinction between householders and monks in bestowing their love and blessings. They showed spiritual conside-

ration for householders, and a sizable part of their teachings was intended for householders. Their holy lives have revealed a new way of life for householders by which they can attain the highest spiritual fulfilment even while discharging the duties of life. Creating large-scale awareness of the spiritual dimension of family life, which forms the theme also of the next article, is a significant achievement of the Ramakrishna Movement.

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Ramakrishna Movement and a New Orientation to Family Life

SUSAN WALTERS

WHEN A DIVINE INCARNATION comes to earth, many changes gradually begin to take place in all spheres of life — in religion, in society, in economics, *et al.* Most of these changes come about so slowly that it is only many years (perhaps centuries) later that historians look back and say, 'Such were the changes that came about with the advent of that Incarnation.' It is impossible to predict exactly how the advent of Sri Ramakrishna will affect any aspect of life; even so, we shall make a bold attempt at the conclusion of this paper to speculate on what changes this advent may bring about in the concept of the family in time to come. Let us begin with a review of what Sri Ramakrishna had to say about and to householders, and how he behaved with his own family.

Sri Ramakrishna's Comments on Family Life

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna[1] is one of the two principal authentic sources of information in English about Sri Ramakrishna, the other being *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*.[2] Here we will refer mostly to the *Gospel*. In the *Gospel*, the word *family* is used fifty-one times, the word *householder* is used over one-hundred times, and *wife*, over forty times. From this we can see that Sri Ramakrishna took great interest in family life. As in dealing with any other subject, his opinions and advice on family matters differed according to the different men and women he was speaking with. Still, these men and women

can be roughly divided into three categories — the majority of devotees, ordinary householders; householder devotees who had an intense yearning for God; and realized souls, devotees who had already reached the goal, had 'seen God', but were still living in the family.

Some of his teachings for householders have been summarized as follows (his exact words, as given in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, can be found on the page number listed after each teaching):

Ordinary Householders

What did Sri Ramakrishna say to 'ordinary householders' who were in the first category? (These devotees were ordinary only in comparison to those who had that rare gift of intense yearning for God. Anyone who sought out Sri Ramakrishna couldn't have been like the average worldly person.)

Husband and wife should live together as brother and sister after the birth of one or two children (p. 874).

The married person should provide for members of his family, thus removing obstacles to his spiritual practice (p. 244).

One should support his children until they can take care of themselves (p. 628).

If you have worldly desires, you should live as a householder and pray to God (p. 244).

From time to time householders must practise spiritual disciplines in solitude, away from the family, thinking, 'God is my only refuge', and praying for knowledge and devotion (p. 313).

Take what money comes of its own course; don't worry too much about it (p. 506).

Always keep your mind on God. Know that family and property are His, and pray for love of God (pp. 456-57).

It is necessary to have holy company; then comes *śraddhā* — faith (p. 580).

If only one of a married couple is spiritually oriented, life becomes miserable, so one must leave the other (p. 326). [Evidently Sri Ramakrishna did not believe in holding the family together under all circumstances.]

Still, if the husband has sincere love for God, his wife may follow his example (p. 126). [It can be assumed that the reverse is also true — the wife may also influence her husband if she has sincere love for God.]

A householder can realize God through perfect devotion to truth (p. 418).

Householders with Intense Dispassion

And what did Sri Ramakrishna say about those householders who had intense longing for God-realization?

A person who has such intense dispassion for the world should renounce his family — even physically. Renouncing only mentally is not enough for him (p. 366).

If you are intoxicated with God, He will take care of your family; you will not have any more duties to perform (p. 628).

A person with intense dispassion looks on his relatives as venomous cobras; he can't think of taking care of them (p. 896).

Householders who Have Realized God

Sri Ramakrishna also had something to say about those who have realized God.

After a person has realized God, he can live in the world, and yet remain utterly unstained by it (p. 757).

Live with your family if you wish, be loving to them, but know they do not belong to you (p. 382).

After you have realized God, you see that the world and all creatures, including your family, are so many manifestations of Him. So you serve them (p. 326).

After God-realization, a man does not usually keep up physical relations with his wife, but passes his time with her in spiritual conversation (p. 326).

The pure mind acquires a new attitude, seeing God in everyone. Nothing whatever exists but God (p. 418).

Who is the father or mother or wife of a Realized Soul? (p. 425)

If the family is a spiritual family, they are always happy, knowing that God alone is their own (p. 402).

When you have attained Knowledge, you may live anywhere. Nothing else matters (p. 411).

Some General Comments on Family Life

Some of Sri Ramakrishna's remarks on family life in general include the following:

Woman monopolizes three-quarters of the mind, which should be given to God. And then after the birth of a child, almost the whole mind is frittered away on the family. Then what is left to give to God? (p. 594)

There is no substance whatsoever in worldly life.... One very seldom comes across such a religious family (as Ishan's) in which all members are devoted to God. I have seen only two or three such families. Generally one finds quarrels, misunderstanding, jealousy and friction (p. 463).

'He is the Master, and the universe and all its living beings belong to Him' — that is Knowledge. And, 'I am the doer', 'I am the guru', 'I am the father' — that is ignorance. 'This is my house; this is my family; this is my wealth; these are my relatives' — this also is ignorance (p. 307).

Don't you see that God incarnates Himself only in a family where innocence exists? How guileless Dasharatha was! (p. 448) [Sri Ramakrishna's father was also innocent and guileless.]

To love only members of the Brahmo Samaj or of one's own family is *māyā*; to love one's own countrymen is *māyā*. But to love the people of all countries, to love the members of all religions is *dayā* (compassion). Such love comes from love of God, from *dayā* (p. 456).

(In answer to the question, why God has put us in the world, Ramakrishna says): To perpetuate His creation. It is His will, His *māyā*. He has deluded man with 'woman and gold'.... If but once he would give man a taste of divine joy, then man would not care to lead a worldly life. The creation would come to an end (p. 385).

'Woman and gold' alone is the world. It makes one forget God (p. 748).

There is a great deal of difference between the knowledge of a householder and that of an all-renouncing sannyāsi. The householder's knowledge

> is like the light of a lamp, which illumines only the inside of a room. He cannot see anything with the help of such knowledge except his own body and his immediate family. But the knowledge of the all-renouncing monk is like the light of the sun. Through that light he can see both inside and outside the room (p. 485).

Ramakrishna's Relationship with His Family Members

As a child, Ramakrishna had great love for his parents. Aware that their son was not an ordinary person, and also because they could not help falling under the spell of his divine nature, his father and mother could hardly bear to correct him in his mischief. Almost from the beginning, Gadai, as he was called, could not be commanded to do anything, or be refrained from doing anything unless he understood the reason for it. His parents thus learned to appeal to his intelligence if they wanted him to do something. However, his love for his parents generally prevented him from disobeying them. But when it came to a matter of truthfulness, he was immovable. A notable example of this steadfast devotion to truth was seen in his insistence on receiving his first alms from Dhani, a low-caste woman, at the time of his sacred thread ceremony when he was nine years old. In answer to Dhani's fervent request to have that privilege, Gadai had promised her that she could give him his first alms after the ceremony. When the family heard about Gadai's promise, they tried to persuade him to change his mind. For a brahmin boy to accept his first alms from anyone but a brahmin woman was unthinkable in the orthodox Hindu society of that time. But Gadai was adamant. How could he be a real brahmin if he did not keep his word? Eventually the family had to give in, and Dhani gave him his first alms.

Gadai's father died when he was only seven, and to help his mother overcome her grief, he tried to divert her mind in various ways — by telling stories, singing songs, and just staying near her. His concern and care for her continued till her death in 1876. After Ramakrishna had become settled at the Kali Temple complex in Dakshineswar, he brought her there to live in a house just outside the temple premises. He stayed in the same room with her for a number of years, and after he moved to his room in the temple compound, he continued to visit her every day, and took his meals with her, sitting at the end of her bed.

It was his concern for his mother that brought him back from Vrindavan where he had gone on pilgrimage in 1868. He became very attached to that holy place and had almost decided to stay in Vrindavan when he remembered his mother and decided to return to Dakshineswar.

Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with Sarada Devi, whom he had married when she was five years old and he twenty-three, was unusual — unusual in the sense that, when she came of age and came to live with him in Dakshineswar, their relationship grew more and more intimate, while remaining completely free from any physical consummation. Sri Ramakrishna was young Sarada's guide, teacher and protector. On his part, Ramakrishna came to value her more and more for her purity, her intelligence and her devotion to God and to her duty. At last he saw in her (as she came to see in him) only Kali, the Divine Mother of the universe. He worshipped the Divine in her, and she worshipped the Divine in him. What conclusion can we come to in regard to Ramakrishna and family life?

- First, it is obvious that Sri Ramakrishna was aware of a hierarchy of values, truthfulness being the pinnacle of all moral virtues. Thus, as the incident of his refusal to give in to family pressure at the time of his sacred thread ceremony shows, speaking the truth had a higher value for him than obedience to his family and traditional customs.
- Second, he dealt with each problem on an individual basis as is revealed in the fact that his strong desire to remain in Vrindavan was overridden by his concern for his mother, but though he could not bear to hurt his mother, he encouraged the future Swami Vivekananda to renounce everything, including his mother and brothers who were in desperate straits.
- Third, though it is true that Sri Ramakrishna said different things to different persons, his most fundamental and most oft-repeated precept — one that applies to all persons, in the family or out of the family — is this: 'The goal of human life is to love God.'[3]

A New Orientation to Family Life

'There is nothing new under the sun.' In predicting how Sri Ramakrishna's advent may bring about a new orientation to family life in time to come, let us

look at the ancient Indian tradition (of which he was a product) to see how the family was viewed there.

Many varied illustrations in the vast Indian literature of how Indians have seen the family could be cited, but one ideal seems basic: There are four stages of life — the stage of the student, the householder, the retired person, and the sannyāsi; and thus family life is only one of the stages of man's journey through life. From this ideal we can come to the following conclusions:

- First, man's life is a journey — this world is not a place for permanent residence.
- Second, life on earth is thus an opportunity for him to progress to higher states of consciousness.
- Third, life as a householder is to consume only one-quarter of this journey.
- And fourth, the first three stages of life are meant as a preparation for the fourth and last stage, the life of perfect renunciation of all self-centred thoughts and actions — a life of unalloyed bliss. Death could be called the fifth stage, except that, ideally, by that time, the person will have realized that it is only the body that dies; he, as Pure Self (Atman), is immortal; there is no death for him.

This old ideal, which seems to be largely forgotten in India and is generally unheard of in the West, may provide a framework for 'a new orientation to family life' in the future. It embodies much of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching and exemplary behaviour. Then what can we expect from the new-old concept of family life that will be the norm when the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement has conquered the world with its powerful weapons of Truth and Love?

- First, from childhood, people will be taught to look at life as an opportunity for growth in all its aspects — mental, physical, spiritual — so that they will not be bogged down in a futile search for ephemeral possessions and pleasures. Thus the competitiveness, jealousy, and envy that a materialistic culture promotes will be minimized.
- Second, family life will be seen for what it is — of short duration and, amidst its joys, afflicted with various kinds of grief.

- Third, meditation and other spiritual disciplines will be taught to all, starting at an early age, so that mind-control will be achieved by many, thus creating harmony in a family even if it consists of different types of individuals.
- Fourth, old age will not be dreaded but approached eagerly as an opportunity to devote oneself to one's own spiritual welfare (which of course will promote the spiritual welfare of others also).
- Fifth, making God-realization the goal of life, everything else will fall into place. Then whether family circumstances are happy or unhappy, whether one has a family or not — none of that will really matter. Nothing can stand in the way of the journey to God.
- Sixth, the principal teaching of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement — the divinity of the soul and its oneness with Brahman, the divine Reality pervading the Universe — will enter the mind and heart of all, and imbue all aspects of life with an aura of holiness.

As Sri Ramakrishna has said, 'With the realization of God, everything undergoes transformation.... It is God Himself that has become the phenomenal universe and all the beings in it.... Recognizing God in all, adoration to Him takes place through the worshipful service of all.'[4]

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Monasticism of the Ramakrishna Order

A NEW ORIENTATION TO MONASTIC LIFE

SWAMI SUNIRMALANANDA

Monasticism: A Brief Appraisal

Monachos (Greek) literally means 'living alone'. The word 'monasticism' has come from that term. Monasticism is an indispensable component of religion. For any religion to be vibrant and living, it is its monastic strength that counts. Monasticism is like fuel to religion: monastics sacrifice their lives for the good of the religion they belong to. It is monastics that keep any religion going and uphold its real spirit. In a way, the ancient institution of monasticism has been the greatest benefactor of humanity. Swami Vivekananda says: 'How can great spirituality come without that renunciation? Renunciation is the background of all religious thought wherever it be, and you will always find that as this idea of renunciation lessens, the more will the senses creep into the field of religion, and spirituality will decrease in the same ratio.'[1]

Why should one become a monk? In other words, what is the fundamental principle of monastic life? 'Realization is religion', says Swami Vivekananda.[2] We wish to become monks so that we may reach the centre, the basis, the essence, of our being. This reaching the centre is called realization, and that is the goal of monasticism.

> Truth never comes where lust and fame and greed
> Of gain reside. No man who thinks of woman

As his wife can ever perfect be;
Nor he who owns the least of things, nor he
Whom anger chains, can ever pass thro' Maya's gates.
So, give these up, Sannyāsin bold! Say — 'Om Tat Sat, Om!'[3]

However, 'real monasticism is not easy to attain', says Vivekananda.[4] This is because the qualifications for a monastic vocation are too high for most people. There should be no compromise at all. The basic canon of monasticism is renunciation. This renunciation is both internal (mental giving up of all attachments) and external (keeping away physically from all attachments). 'To be in the world and not of it, is the true test of the sannyāsin. This idea of renunciation has been in some form common to all religions', says Swamiji.[5] A monk has several tenets to follow; of them, the commonly known ones are chastity, poverty, and obedience. The first tenet is chastity or celibacy. 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'[6] Celibacy is fundamental to monastic life, though these days, unfortunately, there are opinions contrary to this. However, as Sri Ramakrishna has said, without chastity one cannot assimilate higher teachings.[7] In order to realize God, the practice of unbroken chastity is imperative, he adds.[8] Poverty comes next. Poverty shows the monk's total dedication to and love for the ideal. To possess earthly things as little as possible is a monk's ideal. 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.'[9] Swami Vivekananda says, 'In studying the great characters the world has produced, I dare say, in the vast majority of cases...it was poverty that taught more than wealth....'[10] Next, obedience. Obedience to the principles of his calling is imperative for a monk. Then there are other ideals also. Humility is an indispensible quality of a monk. 'It is all very well to talk of liberty and independence, but without humility, submission, veneration, and faith, there will not be any religion', asserts Swamiji.[11] Then there is austerity or mortification without going to extremes. There is learning. Begging in one form or another is another important tenet. These ideals are common to monastics of all religions. By following these ideals, the monk attains the highest and becomes a guide to humanity. One of the greatest qualities of a monk is simplicity. In Greek, it is called *haplotès*, which is the opposite of *dipsychia* or grandeur. A sannyāsin's life is the highest way of life

human beings can envision. He is called *atyāśramī*, one who is beyond all manners of life. The goal of human beings is broadly to overcome suffering and to be perfect. The monk leads the way.

In ancient times, the ascetic lived alone in a secluded place and performed austerities. The age-old ideal was that a monk had nothing to do with the world whatsoever, so he lived far away from anything related to the world. Ascetics of pre-Vedic and Vedic times, Mahavira and Buddha during their *sādhanā*, St. Anthony of Egypt, and many others are examples of this type of life. Slowly, however, the ideal of living alone was replaced by the cenobitic (i.e. group) life. Those ascetics who lived alone began to allow young aspirants to live with them, and thus various schools came into being. At first there were no rules for monks. The idea of organized monastic life was perhaps first presented by Mahavira to the world. He formulated detailed rules for monks: about how they should live, what they should eat, where they should go and when, and so on. The Buddha came next. His doctrine was preeminently monastic, and his method of initiation into monasticism was utterly simple. Those who surrendered to the Buddha, the Sangha, and the Dharma would instantly become monks. He thus had a very large following. Soon after the Buddha left his body some changes were made, and thus rituals were introduced. In Christianity, there were no set rules for monks initially. St Basil the Great (330 CE) was the first monk to formulate monastic rules. Later, St Benedict's Rule became very prominent, and even now it is held in esteem.

Sannyāsi, *sādhu*, *tāpasa*, *muni*, *yogī*, *siddha*, *yati*, *bhikṣu*, *śramaṇa*, *vairāgi*, *dervish*, hermit, anchorite, monk — there are numerous names.[12] There are numerous types also. Down the centuries, there have been numerous religious orders. There were the Orphic mysteries; there were the Essenes and the Therapeutae; Buddhism had Theravadins, Mahayana Buddhists, Tantric monks, etc; Jainism had Shvetambaras and Digambaras; Hinduism had Yogis, Shaiva sadhus, *daśanāmī* sannyāsins, Nāgās, Nānākpanthis, Kānphaṭā yogis, Vairāgis, Vaishnava sādhus, Nāthapanthis, etc. Christianity had Carthusians, Benedictines, Friars, Jesuits, Congregationalists, Trappists, and so on, to name a few. Islam had its own fakirs and Sufis. Jews had their rabbis. From extreme self-torture to extravagance, the history of monasticism is a colourful story. Sitting on a pillar for decades, tying oneself to a pole for years, wearing hair-shirts, torturing the body by endless means — this was

one extreme. The other extreme was leading easy lives. Between these two extremes was the middle path: leading pious lives, totally given to God or Truth. From Order to Order, from group to group, from sect to sect, the practices varied. However, the goal was the same: to overcome imperfections and to reach the supreme end of life.

The Hindu Ideal of Monasticism

The question was raised in the beginning as to what inspires a man to become a monk. The answer given there was, the desire for the realization of the ultimate Reality. The author of the *Brahma Sūtras*, Bādarāyana, says that it is by realization of the supreme Truth alone that the ultimate purpose of man is achieved.[13] And this supreme knowledge belongs to those who observe continence (i.e., to sannyāsins) because the fourth *ashrama* is recommended in the Vedas.[14]

Monasticism was known in India even in the Vedic times.[15] 'The whole national soul there is upon monasticism', remarks Swamiji.[16] However, he also adds that while Buddhism became the religion of a monastic order, Hinduism, 'in spite of its exaltation of monasticism, remains ever the religion of faithfulness to daily duty, whatever it be, as the path by which man may attain God.'[17]

In the *Ṛg-Veda* the word *muni* occurs several times; perhaps there were many ascetics by that name. It is said that there were many naked mendicants, living in lonely caves, hermitages, etc. They were perhaps called *munis*.

> Indra is declared to be their friend. It should be noted that in later times 'muni' comes to be derived as a name for ascetics because of meditation (*mananāt*). In one passage of the *Ṛg-Veda* (X. 136. 2), these 'munis' are described as 'vātaraśana, keśin', and as wearing yellow and soiled garments.... The fact that in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (II. 7) Rishis are said to have existed in former times, who were not described, as a little later they came to be, as either 'Sannyāsins' or 'Parivrājakas' but as 'Shramaṇas', that is, those who were 'endeavouring', is significant. It should be noted that even in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, ...at one place (IV. 3. 22), occur the terms 'Shramaṇa' and 'Tāpasa'.[18]

> The other group of people mentioned in the *Ṛg-Veda* is 'yatis'. If 'muni' means one who meditates or reflects, 'yati' is one who is controlled.... The Ṛg-Vedic Indo-Aryans had developed among them a class of ascetics who were...naked and credited with miraculous powers.[19]

Apart from those who lived the ascetic's life by choice, there was a speciality about Hinduism: The Indian ideal was that every man of the upper three classes (*brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, and *vaiśya*) had to end his life as a sannyāsin.[20] Every man had to study, lead a householder's life, and then retire to become a sannyāsin. If, however, he wished to give up the world at any stage, he was welcome to do so. Naturally, the number of sannyāsins was great in earlier times. But nothing can definitely be said about the monastic situation during the early post-Vedic period. Like many other areas where precise details are hidden in obscurity, monastic history too is hidden. However, we can easily conjecture that post-Vedic India saw several groups of monastics, prominent among them being the Buddhist monks and nuns, the Jaina monks and nuns, and the Kāpālikas, Pāshupatas, etc. Though there have been many types of ascetics in India since time immemorial, there are no records of any rules laid down for monks in Hinduism apart from those in the *smṛtis*.

Shankara, for the first time perhaps in Hindu monasticism, gave a definite shape to the prevalent monastic tradition. He had to first of all confront the existing monastic situation boldly. It is said that he faced the Kāpālikas, the Buddhists and so on, and won them over. He then set about organizing the ascetics. He divided monastics into ten broad denominations and gave them different names. He founded four monasteries in four regions of India, appointing one monk as the head of each, so that the monks could look after the spiritual welfare of those people who came under their respective regions. The ten denominations of monastics fall under these four Maths. The Govardhana Math had monastics titled *Araṇya* and *Vana*; the Shringeri Math had *Saraswati*, *Bharati*, and *Puri*; the Sharada Math had *Tīrtha* and *Āshrama*; and finally, the Jyoti Math had *Giri*, *Parvata*, and *Sāgara*. What were the distinctions? Nothing definite is understood from Shankara's *Matha-āmnāya* except that each of the four Vedas, the four main disciples of Shankara, four Gods and Goddesses, and so on were assigned to each of the four Maths; methods of initiation into sannyāsa were slightly different in the different

Maths, at least with respect to the initiation into the 'great statements' (*mahāvākyas*). Post-Shankara monasticism stuck to the Shankarite division more or less. Even Vaishnava sadhus originally belonged to the *daśanāmī sampradāya* of Shankara. There have been many Orders of monks, amongst whom special mention could be made of the famous Nāgas. Though they belong to the *daśanāmi* tradition, the Nāgas form a distinct monastic group.

The Monastic Patterns

Monks had a distinctive appearance: they were to be different from others in every respect. Their dress was different from that of householders. From sky-clad monks (*digambaras*) to yellow, or ochre, or brown, or black, or white-clad monks, there has been a great variety in monastic dress. From shaven heads to matted hair and beards, their hair was worn in different ways.[21] From those who lived merely on leaves and plants to those who did not care what food they ate, the monks had a variety of food habits. Their dwelling places were of several types: in mountain caves, beneath trees, in huts, hermitages, and so on.[22] Monks usually slept on the bare ground (*sthandilashāyin*). A sannyāsin had no work.[23] He was totally free from all social obligations. The chief occupation of a monk was contemplation: he contemplated on the unity of his self with the supreme Self. He cared not what people said of him, ill or well. His utmost concern was to be pure and divine himself, and help others towards that end.[24] Though most of the monks were monists, post-Shankara monasticism brought many sects of dualists and qualified monists into the monastic fold, and thus the spiritual practices of monks varied: from contemplation on the unity of the *jīvātman* and the *paramātman* to different types of devotional practices.

Though the ideal was the realization of the Self and the method was total renunciation, it was not possible for everyone to hold on to the ideal so strictly. Everyone who took to monastic life was sincere, but the rigours of the ascetic's life was not for all to withstand. Hence there was a lowering of the ideal as days passed. Some monks became only scholars, studying some scriptures, and others were peripatetic, moving about perhaps aimlessly. The changes in social life, urbanization, the contraction of the globe on account of the communication boom, ever-increasing socio-economic problems, political compul-

sions, and other difficulties — all led to a sort of confusion in monastic life, specially in India. A new direction was therefore necessary.

The Advent of Sri Ramakrishna

Fortunately for us, times change. Real changes happen not when a Chandragupta Maurya or a Napoleon is born. All that such people can do is bring about metastasis — remove the disease from one place and place it in another. An Avatar or a prophet alone can change times. They effect a real metamorphosis – they change the whole thing imperceptibly. Such unique personalities create a tremendous change in the world's outlook, behaviour, lifestyles, attitudes, and so on. So, by change of times we mean a total change of human life. This is called *dharma sthāpana.*

That which sustains human beings on earth is called dharma. Our birth, growth, death — all are controlled by dharma. Dharma is defined as that which nourishes (*dhāryate anena iti*); dharma nourishes life. An Avatar comes when this nourisher itself becomes undernourished. How does this nourisher become undernourished? It is owing to human decadence. What human beings do on this earth is only consume. We consume food, we consume nature's resources, we consume life -- we are great consumers. From generation to generation, all that we do is consume the best and leave the remnant for posterity. This happens in the case of ideas also. Suppose there is a great ideal given by some great personality. All that we do is go on simplifying it from generation to generation, and in due course the spirit of the original ideal is totally lost. This leads to the advent of a great personality again. Dharma, incidentally, can mean certain primordial principles or grand ideals.[25] Without proper ideals as guidelines, how will a person lead a meaningful life? When dharma becomes undernourished owing to the passage of time, there follows a depletion of great ideals and that brings the Avatar down. So, an Avatar comes to nourish dharma. With his advent, there is a rejuvenation on all fronts, and hence, from Avatar to Avatar, we have a change of *yugas*, great periods of time.

The Avatar neither says that the old alone is the best and restores it fully nor does he bring about a sea change, completely discarding the old. He silently metamorphoses a creeping larva into a beautiful butterfly. He simply lives a remarkable life, and that nourishes dharma. This nourishing is called *dharma*

sthāpana, the establishment of dharma. The Avatar does not care what name a religion has or by what name people call it. He simply leads an exemplary life, sets up a supreme standard, and leaves behind some teachings and followers, thereby strengthening dharma.

Sri Ramakrishna's advent was one such revolutionary event. His advent is said to herald the Golden Age (*satya yuga*). Sri Ramakrishna established religion, so said Swamiji.[26] What was the religion that Sri Ramakrishna established? It was *sanātana dharma*, the eternal religion. And the foundation of this eternal religion is renunciation.

Sri Ramakrishna's Founding of a New Order

Narendra came to Sri Ramakrishna in search of God. He was well read in Western philosophy and had understood that 'where philosophy ends there religion begins'. He practised meditation and came to Sri Ramakrishna, having heard that he had seen God. Sri Ramakrishna told Narendra that God can be seen. Narendra was then trained systematically in spiritual life by Sri Ramakrishna. Scepticism, rationalism, and iconoclasm were popular attitudes of those days and had influenced Narendra too. But his contact with his Master changed his ideas completely. Sri Ramakrishna took special care that this beloved disciple of his should not fall into the snares of the world nor be bigoted in any way. He wanted Narendra to teach the world the eternal truths of spirituality. For this, his disciple should be free: he should not be tied down to worldly bondages. Once 'when the Master came to my study and was giving me the instruction to observe life-long continence, my grandmother overheard everything and informed my parents of it. They began making great efforts from that day to get me married lest I should become a monk by moving with a Sadhu. But of what avail was all that? All their efforts against the strong will of the Master failed.'[27]

Narendra's personal life too underwent many upheavals during these years, with his father passing away, his family being subjected to grinding poverty, and he himself failing to get a good job. Under all such circumstances, there was something which held him tightly to his Master. He could never forgo contact with his Master, and Sri Ramakrishna too had immense faith in his beloved disciple. One day, when Narendra was exhausted after a tiring

search for a job, when he was drenched in rain, when he had been without food for the whole day, he had a unique experience. He says, 'I suddenly felt as if within my mind many screens were raised one after another by some providential power, and I saw in the innermost recesses of my heart the solutions of the problems which so long had baffled my intellect and distracted my mind.... I was beside myself with joy.... And, firmly convinced that I was not born to earn money, serve the family and spend time in worldly enjoyment like people in general, I was secretly getting ready to renounce the world like my grandfather.'

Sri Ramakrishna came to know of this, and one day he told him: 'Know that you have come to the world for the Mother's work; you can never live a worldly life. But remain in your family for my sake as long as I live.'[28] After that, Narendra became increasingly more concerned with his search for God. He learnt avidly from Sri Ramakrishna. Having a sharp intellect, he could understand Sri Ramakrishna's teachings like none else. Swami Saradananda says that people would wonder at Narendra's brilliant exposition of the Master's words and would think that though they also had heard the same words, they could not understand their deeper implications like Narendra. One such point was about serving a *jīva* as Shiva; we shall refer to this later.

Before his passing away, Sri Ramakrishna prophesied that his boy devotees like Narendra 'will renounce the world and go forward towards God....'[29] It is to be mentioned here that Sri Ramakrishna himself had been ordained into the ancient order of monks by Totapuri in 1864. So he knew the glory of monasticism through and through. The Master's desire to make his boy devotees lead God-centred lives, and also found an Order of monks, came true one day when he himself distributed ochre clothes to them. The incident is described beautifully in the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*:

> One day Gopal Senior expressed his desire to the Master to distribute ochre cloths and rudraksha rosaries among sannyāsins. Pointing to his young disciples, Sri Ramakrishna answered, 'You won't find better monks than these elsewhere. Give your cloths and rosaries to them.' Gopal placed a bundle of ochre cloths before the Master, who distributed them among his young disciples.... One evening the Master made the young boys go through a ceremony and permitted them to receive food from the houses of all

> irrespective of caste. Thus it was that the disciples were initiated into the monastic Order by the Master himself, and the foundation of the future Ramakrishna Order was laid.[30]

Narendra's aspiration for the highest Truth was fulfilled one day when he attained the highest samādhi. Sri Ramakrishna told him: 'Now the Mother has shown you all. But this realization of yours shall be locked up for the present, and the key will remain with me. When you have finished doing Mother's work, this treasure will again be yours.'[31] After the Master's passing away, the young disciples lived in the Baranagore monastery for some time before proceeding for *tapasyā*. But before that, the formal inauguration of Ramakrishna monasticism took place on Christmas Eve in 1886 at Antpur, a tiny village in West Bengal, which was the native village of Baburam (later Swami Premananda). At Baburam's mother's invitation, the young disciples of the Master had gone to Antpur. There was great enthusiasm amongst the disciples.

> The enthusiasm reached its heights, quite unconsciously, on Christmas Eve, when before a burning log of wood Narendra and his brothers kept vigil, talking passionately of the life of Christ and the glories of renunciation. This stirred up the dormant spirit of renunciation in those who had lagged behind, and shortly after their return, the Baranagore monastery had its full complement of monks, all pledged to a life of the highest asceticism.[32]

A few months later, the disciples took formal monastic vows by performing the *virajā* sacrifice and they assumed monastic names. Unfortunately, the date is lost. This, then, was the beginning. A strong and solid foundation had been laid for a great Sangha, whose dimensions were to be global.

Narendra, who became Vivekananda, wandered all over India soon after all these events. The prevalent Indian situation taught him stunning truths. The first thing he noticed, though sadly, was that religion and actual life had no connection at all! While there were grand ideals of oneness, of eternal happiness, of peace, and so on, what was the reality? Millions toiled endlessly, for nothing. There was distress everywhere, with no solution or help in sight. The problems were numerous: poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, disease, lack of hygiene, worry. There appeared to be no answer at all under the circumstances then. However, there were hundreds of texts, promising eternal happiness and bliss even as

there were brilliant pundits, expounding them to their hearts' content. Then there were the monks. Monasticism had come to such a pass that ill-clad, hungry, emaciated, and diseased monks wandered everywhere, having lost their moorings and not knowing what to do with the burden called their bodies.

Vivekananda and the New Monastic Ideal

In 1894 Swami Vivekananda wrote to a brother disciple:

> At Cape Comorin, sitting in Mother Kumari's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock — I hit upon a plan: We are so many Sannyāsins wandering about and teaching people metaphysics — it is all madness.... Did not our Gurudeva used to say, 'An empty stomach is no good for religion'?... Suppose some disinterested Sannyāsins, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village, disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all down to the Chandāla...can't that bring forth good in time?[33]

This thought was always in his mind. While in the West, he said:

> ...there are these hundreds and thousands of monks, educating the people on the spiritual plane; why not let these men do the same work on the intellectual plane? Why should they not talk to the masses a little about history — about many things?... You go to India and preach any religion as a householder: the Hindu people will turn back and go out. If you have given up the world, however, they say, 'He is good, he has given up the world. He is a sincere man, he wants to do what he preaches.'... This tremendous power in the hands of the roving Sannyāsins of India has got to be transformed, and it will raise the masses up.[34]

That was the beginning of a new look at monasticism. Hitherto known only to be other-worldly, to be going away from the world, to be renouncing the world, monasticism became 'this-worldly' with Swami Vivekananda. The Christian monastic tradition might have already taken to serving human beings. Hindu Nāgā monks too might have been inspired by Madhusudana Saraswati to fight enemies. But for the first time, Hinduism found an organized monastic way of life, dedicated to the welfare of humanity as well as to the realization

of the Self. Swamiji coined a phrase: *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca*, 'for the liberation of the self and for the benefit of the world.'

Swami Vivekananda defines renunciation as 'love of death'. By love of death, he does not mean suicide but dying for a good cause.[35] This is a new definition. He defines sannyāsa as 'to do good to others'.[36] Swamiji was a great lover of solitary life. He had always wished to remain all his life in meditation in some remote cave. Yet he said that the monastic ideal was service to humanity. How could this be possible? His Master's teachings, his wandering all over India, and the firsthand experience of the fate of sannyāsins on one hand and the masses on the other, led him to this. Improvement in the lives of both classes was the urgent need. To improve both monks and laity, the way Swamiji discovered was to bring them together. He decided that the old idea of sitting in a cave till one died was not good now. He therefore desired to establish an Order of monks whose ideal would not only be to work for their own salvation, but to help others reach the same goal.

The Ideal of Renunciation

'Neither by works, nor by progeny, nor by wealth can immortality be attained; renunciation alone will lead to it',[37] declare our scriptures unequivocally. In the case of monks, Sri Ramakrishna was for complete renunciation. According to him, 'Renunciation means dispassion for things of the world.'[38] He also says that real renunciation is the renunciation of 'woman and gold'.[39] But, again, to renounce the 'I' is real renunciation. 'Renounce the "I" and keep the "ego of Knowledge",' Ramakrishna says.[40] Renunciation does not mean only giving up something outside — a house, a car, a loved one, and so on — but giving up the lower self. Ramakrishna says that dispassion comes when we give up attachment to our lower self. It is this lower self that makes us get attached to various things of the world. What remains when this lower self is given up is the Atman, the summum bonum of religion. Sri Ramakrishna repeated several times that renunciation should be intense. Without intense renunciation, Ramakrishna would say, one can never attain God. 'Intense renunciation is the means to God.'[41] This intense renunciation means renunciation of *everything* — everything but God. Swamiji says, 'You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be

ready to go and cultivate the fields.'[42] Sri Ramakrishna's words in this context are vital:

> He [a sannyāsi] must not look even at the portrait of a woman.... As he must not look even at the portrait of a woman, so also he must not touch gold, that is to say, money.... Why all these strict rules for a sannyāsi? It is for the welfare of mankind as well as for his own good. A sannyāsi may himself lead an unattached life and may have controlled his passion, but he must renounce 'woman and gold' to set an example to the world. A man will have the courage to practice renunciation if he sees one hundred per cent renunciation in a sannyāsi.[43]

Real religion never consisted in rituals, in myths, in external pomp, though all these are 'secondary details'. It never was said to consist in material prosperity. Real religion always consisted in sacrifice: the sacrifice of our lower self so that we may attain the highest. We cannot be at both the North Pole and the South Pole at the same moment: one of them has to be left behind. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated in his life that we can attain supreme bliss by renunciation. His entire life was a glorious demonstration of renunciation. His ideal of renunciation was taken up by his disciples who became all-renouncing monks. They in turn taught this ideal to their disciples, and this was how the Ramakrishna Math came into being.

Through Work to Worklessness

From what has been said above, it appears at first glance that Swamiji bypassed tradition in advocating activities for monks. Critics during Swamiji's time, and later on also, pointed this out. However, this is not true; we should know that Swamiji never went against the scriptures. Firstly, Shankara, who may be considered the patriarch of Hindu monasticism, is generally thought to have advocated total emancipation from work for monastics. This, however, is an overstatement. His disciples were told to write glosses (*vārtikas*) and commentaries on various texts. They were also told to look after the spiritual welfare of large parts of the subcontinent. So, it is wrong to think that Shankara absolved the sannyāsin of all duties. Secondly, there is an interesting discussion in the *Brahma Sūtras* (3.4) about work. Jaimini, the Mimāmsaka, is quoted by

Bādarāyana as arguing in favour of work, and saying that the scriptures themselves show that even men of knowledge like King Janaka performed actions. He says that actions are prescribed by the *śrutis*.[44] Referring to the famous mantra of the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad*, Jaimini says that the *śruti* clearly states that all human beings have to work if they wish to live a hundred years in this world.[45] This appears to be a favourable argument indeed. But Jaimini's argument is not in favour of monastics — he asserts that monasticism is not at all prescribed by the scriptures![46] He quotes one or two instances to prove his point. Bādarāyana, the Vedantist, rejects this claim firmly and says that the scriptures indeed champion sannyāsa.[47] Now, what about work? Bādarāyana says that the Self is not the doer — the scriptures say this repeatedly. Once an aspirant attains the Self, he no longer needs to work. What about men of knowledge like Janaka then? Bādarāyana says that the declarations of the Vedas support both views equally.[48] He says that some people, though they might have attained supreme knowledge, may perform work by choice.[49] The declaration in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*[50] that 'that alone which is performed with knowledge, etc. is more powerful', is not universally true, he says.[51] Bādarāyana says that with the dawn of knowledge, there is the destruction of all qualifications for work.[52] In which fortunate soul will knowledge dawn? He who has renounced all worldly desires and put in intense effort — the monastic — is that fortunate soul. So, a monk who has attained to higher spiritual states can no longer perform any activity.

But that is a higher ideal. The ideal of *akriyā*, worklessness, is meant for those monks who have attained the supreme goal of life. Whether they work or not is left to them. As Sri Ramakrishna says: 'After a man has attained samādhi, all his actions drop away.... At the beginning there is much ado about work. As a man makes progress toward God, the outer display of his work becomes less and less — so much so that he cannot even sing the name and glories of God.'[53] However, there are some illumined souls who retain their individuality in order to teach the world. 'Shankaracharya retained the "ego of Knowledge" in order to teach others.... Just so, a man established in samādhi comes down to the relative plane of consciousness in order to teach others.' So, work is optional for such persons. So far as others are concerned, Ramakrishna says: 'Perform your duties in an unselfish spirit.... All, without exception, perform work. Even to chant His name and glories is work, as is the meditation of the

non-dualist on "I am He". Breathing is also an activity. There is no way of renouncing work altogether. So do your work and surrender the result to God.'[54] Therefore, the rest should work. There is one more reason. 'It is through the performance of activities alone that Janaka and others attained knowledge.'[55]

Swami Vivekananda wanted the monks of his Order to work for the welfare of the world. By work, he did not mean such work as would bind the monk to the world. He meant selfless service. This ideal of selfless service he learnt from Sri Ramakrishna. When Sri Ramakrishna was speaking about the Vaishnava ideal of compassion to living beings, he remarked that it was not compassion but service that was needed, which is to look upon living beings as embodiments of God.[56] Swamiji took keen interest in this ideal of serving God in a human being. He gave it a special place in his philosophy. This was what he taught his Order of monks also.

Why is work necessary for an all-renouncing monk? Firstly, all spiritual methods necessarily stress purity of mind. How can mental purity be achieved? There are several methods, of which selfless work is an important one. Through selfless work, through serving the living gods, the mind is purified more quickly than through any other means, assures Swamiji. When the mind is purified, there will be no need of work any longer. 'Pure mind, pure buddhi, and pure Atman are one and the same,'[57] says Sri Ramakrishna. So, to reach a state of worklessness, we shall have to work. Secondly, it is difficult, as Sri Ramakrishna foresaw, for the monk of the present day to be immersed in contemplation all the time. He has to do something so that the mind is not given to vices. It is therefore better to work for others with the conviction that one is serving the Divine in them. Thirdly, changing situations foretell that the ideal of begging (*mādhukarī*) is no longer feasible for a monk. With the social complexities, escalating prices and other factors, it is difficult for a monk to sustain himself all his life by begging. And it is not possible for all monks to live in Uttarkashi or two or three other places where there are charitable institutions providing food for monks. One is left wondering as to how long these institutions will provide food after all. The first generation of Ramakrishna monks had to wander for days without food. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, who was 'the only one who sympathised with the idea of those boys',[58] initially prayed that there should be no difficulty for her monastic children in getting bare necessities:

> O Lord, you came, disported yourself with these few and then went away; should everything end with that? If so, where was the need for your coming down in the midst of such misery? I have seen in Varanasi and Vrindavan many holy men who get their food by begging and shift their stay from the shade of one tree to another. There is no dearth of holy men of that type. I cannot bear to see the plight of my sons, who go forth in your name, roaming about begging their food. My prayer is that those who leave the world in your name may never be in want of bare subsistance.[59]

Fourthly, from the point of view of mental and physical health, it is imperative for every monk to work selflessly. Swamiji tried his method upon a few of his brother disciples and found that he was right — unselfish work brings more joy than other methods. Fifthly, all of us have some social commitment. A monk is no exception to the rule. Being a parasite and living off the society's resources is counterproductive. Though the scriptures declare the benefits of serving monks, the monks on their part should also see that they do not overburden society.

For these and several other reasons, Swamiji introduced selfless service amongst the Ramakrishna Sangha monks. (The Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission are jointly referred to as the Ramakrishna Sangha. Initially there was only the Math. In order to extend the work of the Order into the social field, the Ramakrishna Mission was founded with the active cooperation of lay devotees.) Traditional sadhus made fun of this new way of monastic life followed by the Ramakrishna Math monks. Who would accept, all of a sudden, a group of gerua-clad men, without ashes on their person, without emaciated bodies, without beards and matted hair, but moving about in vehicles and serving others? When the Order's monks went to work among the sick by opening hospitals, they were called *bhangi-sadhus* (scavenger monks). India had never witnessed such a scene before: sannyāsins going about working for the welfare of others! A hundred years later, it is now the rage.

Harmony and Synthesis

To work selflessly does not mean that monks should engage in providing only physical relief to those around. Service can be of any type, depending

upon the needs of the person who is served. Thus, ranging from educating children to providing spiritual instruction to seekers, there is virtually nothing that Ramakrishna monks do not do. Relief activities during natural calamities, education, medical care, technical training, social welfare, sanitation, village-improvement activities, training the underprivileged to help them stand on their own feet, providing moral and spiritual guidance, publication activities — these are a few of their multifarious activities. After a century, the Sangha today (in October 2005) has 1116 monks and 426 brahmachārins (novices waiting to be ordained into sannyāsa). With so few people, the Sangha has been able to run its 163 centres worldwide. During its 100-year history, the Mission has conducted over 70 cyclone relief operations, 100 major drought relief activities, 75 fire relief activities, 75 refugee rehabilitation services, 300 flood relief operations, and over 100 other welfare programmes. The Mission treated in 2003-04 — through its 15 hospitals with 2,032 beds, 120 dispensaries, and 46 mobile dispensaries in different centres — nearly 80 lakh patients. The Mission runs (2003-04) 858 educational centres, big and small. Out of them, 270 are non-formal educational centres. During the year 1997-98, Rs. 370 million was spent on its educational activities. By the year 2003-04, this expenditure increased to 910 million rupees. The Sangha publishes over 18 journals in 12 languages. Every monk knows how to work in almost any department, and that is the uniqueness of this Order. The Ramakrishna Math sees to it that no monk has a lopsided development. When Swami Premananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, noticed a young monk busy in the garden all through the day, he called him and told him to study an encyclopedia within three months.

Selfless work is not the only distinctive quality of Ramakrishna Math monks. There are several others. The monks of the Ramakrishna Math are trained to be multi-dimensional. They work, they worship, they study, they practise yoga, they pray, they sing — there is practically nothing helpful to monastic life that the monks do not do. It was the standing instruction of Swami Vivekananda that a combination of all the four yogas would be the ideal of the future. In accordance with this ideal, the monks of the Ramakrishna Movement, who are karma-yogis, are also students of *jñāna*, *yoga*, and *bhakti*. This ideal of harmony and synthesis is symbolized by the emblem of the Order drawn by Swamiji himself.

Open to All

Sri Ramakrishna practised various religions. Following this ideal, the monks are taught to look upon all religions as true. This is something fundamental to the spirit of the Ramakrishna monks. Ramakrishna monasticism is a sweet combination of the best elements of almost all religions. Not only that, Ramakrishna Math monks are convinced that to follow a single path, to attain a single goal, is being narrow. Thus, in Ramakrishna centres, all festivals are given equal importance: it may be Christmas, it may be some other ceremony, but each is celebrated with equal devotion. Such a broad outlook is quite novel.

One more important characteristic is that aspirants of all religions are allowed to join the monastery. There is also no distinction of caste in the organization. The only conditions are: the educated, cultured, devout young who aspire to become monks should be unmarried and within a specified age-limit.

Love and Discipline without Regimentation

The first thing a new entrant notices is love. The transition from home to monastery is very smooth for any new entrant. He perhaps feels that he receives more love than his parents showered on him. The one preeminent characteristic of the Ramakrishna Math is that it is founded on and built by love. This pure, unselfish love Sri Ramakrishna vouchsafed on his Sangha. This is very important in view of the fact that lack of love is a serious problem of the present-day world. It is said that once there was an old monk in the Himalayas who was very ill. Those who stayed near him said that according to Vedanta the world is unreal, and so left him to suffer!

The second thing that a new entrant experiences in the Ramakrishna Math is that he is as free as a bird. Growth is something from 'inside-out'; it is never from 'outside-in'. Ideas can only be stimuli, not manufacturers of life. Each individual has a particular yoga, a particular way of life, and there is absolute freedom for him to grow and develop accordingly. Freedom is the basic condition of growth, said Swamiji, and that is put into practice very well in the Ramakrishna Order. There is no regimentation here: you are free to pray

as you wish, work as you wish, take up whatever specialization you wish, utilize your time in whichever fruitful way you wish. This, however, does not mean that the organization does not have rules. Swamiji himself has framed rules, though reluctantly, saying that the ideal is to go beyond rules. The broad rules state the fundamentals of monastic life beautifully. The administration of the Sangha is perfectly democratic. The entire monastic fold comes under a few monks, trustees of the Math and members of the Governing Body of the Mission, who control all the activities of the Sangha. It is from among these trustees that the President and Vice-Presidents, General Secretary and Assistant Secretaries are chosen, and they in turn appoint heads of branch centres. The members of the Governing body are the policy-makers.

The monks of the Ramakrishna Sangha wake up generally by 3:30 in the morning and attend community prayer. There are evening vespers which all monks attend. They all meditate at least twice a day, apart from individual inclinations to contemplative life. The Ramakrishna monks are, unlike monks of old, clad in tailored shirt and *dhoti*; over the shirt they wear a piece of cloth, or wrapper, known as a *chaddar*, especially on ceremonial occasions. They all eat together; eating together is yet another important part of their daily life making for harmony. The monks have a choice of non-vegetarian or vegetarian food according to taste and habit, but care is taken not to offend public sentiment in areas where vegetarianism prevails. 'Weakness is sin',[60] Swamiji would say, and so he has suggested eating non-vegetarian food if necessary.

Absence of regimentation is necessary for the younger generation of modern times who come from liberal societies. It would be counterproductive for an organization to expect a grown-up young man, who probably held a good position in society, to become a baby once he enters the Order. Swamiji said:

> All my life I am repeating what Jack said and John said, and never say anything myself. What glory is it that you know what John said twenty-five years ago and what Jack said five years ago? Tell me what *you* have to say.... The only value of knowledge is in the strengthening, the disciplining, of the mind.... I will only be too glad if I can excite in you the power of thinking for yourselves.... My ambition is to talk to men and women, not to sheep. By men and women, I mean individuals.... Think wrong if you will, no

matter whether you get truth or not. The whole point is to discipline the mind.[61]

Is free-thinking ever possible under regimentation?

Bedrock of Experience

The other distinctive characteristic of the Ramakrishna Movement is that it is built on the bedrock of experience. Sri Ramakrishna practised all paths and verified their truth.

> The life of Shri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary searchlight under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of Hindu religion. He was the object-lesson of all the theoretical knowledge given in the Shāstras (scriptures).... The books were theories, he was the realisation. This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life and so raised himself to be an object-lesson for future generations.[62]

It is on such a strong and firm foundation of experience that the Ramakrishna Sangha has been built. This means the monks have unflinching faith that they are part of a great spiritual community, and that God-realization is certainly possible.

In *Blessed Simplicity*, Raimundo Panikkar makes a distinction between an organization and an organism.[63] An organization becomes institutionalized, and that is not good. Institutionalization of monasticism is bad, he says. An organization runs with the help of money whereas an organism runs with the help of life, he says. The Ramakrishna Order sees to it that it does not become just an organization, but is an organism too, whose life is Sri Ramakrishna. The Sangha is regarded as Sri Ramakrishna's body. 'The Ramakrishna Movement has also avoided the much more deadly mistake of trying to create a cult of itself. It has never become, in this sense, a "Church".... When a religious movement becomes a "Church", it must inevitably become involved in politics.... The Ramakrishna Movement has, to its enormous credit, always refused to become politically involved....,' writes Christopher Isherwood.[64]

One more unique feature of monasticism in the Ramakrishna Order is the importance it gives to study and scholarship. Scholarship is not limited to the scriptures of any particular religion. All the spiritual luminaries of the Order were, and are, great scholars. This is important because generally those who are given to spiritual life are seen to be not very particular about knowledge. Swamiji was against one-sided growth and therefore adequate care is taken to see that not a single monk remains unlearned. Well-equipped libraries are at the disposal of monks in all centres.

Apart from traditional learning, Ramakrishna monasticism insists on modern learning also. In keeping up with the times, it is imperative that the monks have computer education, knowledge of science, and so on, and great care is taken to provide that to them. But the monks are never allowed to lose themselves in Harappan civilization, or in Bill Gates's civilization. To strike a smooth balance between the two is so difficult, but is done so well in the Order. The striking of such a unique balance is the topic discussed in the next article.

Learning, selfless work, etc. do not preclude austerities. *Tapasyā* is greatly encouraged in the Ramakrishna Order, and every monk spends some time each year in solitude in intense spiritual *sādhanā*. It has been tried and found that staying away for long periods will not help. So the austerity of selfless work is encouraged. Each monk is given ample opportunity to develop and cultivate himself.

The Guru Paramparā

No success is possible without the grace of the spiritual teacher. Supreme truths are conveyed to posterity through a succession of spiritual teachers. The Ramakrishna Sangha has this great privilege. Starting with Sri Ramakrishna himself, there has been a great lineage of gurus who have carried intact the spiritual treasures to the present day. And the process continues. The guru is a great help in spiritual growth. In the Ramakrishna Sangha, the young novice is always under someone's supervision, and he can have access to guidance whenever he needs it. The guru is always there to guide him.

The spiritual world is infinite and has infinite potentialities. There can be no end to spiritual truths and revelations. Keeping this in view, the Ramakrishna Math monks are welcome to discover newer paths to spirituality.

A question has been raised about monks in recent times: is a monk a universal model? There are contrary opinions, but the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideal has been to make the monk a model for the world. As renunciation is the basic principle of religion, the monk, who is a *karma yogi*, a *jñāna yogi*, a *bhakti yogi*, and a *rāja yogi* all rolled in one, and also a personification of renunciation, will certainly be the role model for everyone. Following him, the world will struggle to attain the only goal that is to be attained in human life — God-realization.

References

1 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989], IV: 183-84. Hearafter *Complete Works*.

2 Ibid., IX (1997): 279.

3 'The Song of the Sannyāsin', Ibid., IV: 394.

4 Ibid., VII: 251.

5 Ibid., VIII, 9.

6 The Holy Bible. St. Matthew, 18.3.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda [Madras: Ramakrishna Math], 414. Hereafter *Gospel*.

Ibid., 411.

9 The Holy Bible. St. Matthew, 19:21.

10 *Complete Works*, I: 27.

11 Ibid., IV: 27-28.

12 *Tapasvī tāpasaḥ pāri-kāṅkṣī vācaṃyamo muniḥ; Tapaḥ-kleśa-saho dānto varṇino brahmacāriṇaḥ — Amarakośa*, 2.7.42.

13 *Puruṣārtho'taḥ, śabdāditi bādarāyaṇaḥ — Brahma Sūtras*, 3.4.1.

14 *Ūrdhva-retaḥsu ca. śabde hi — Brahma Sūtras*, 3.4.17.

15 *Putraiṣaṇāyāśca vittaiṣaṇāyāśca lokaiṣaṇāyāśca vyutthāyātha bhaikṣyacaryaṃ caranti — Śatapatha Brāḥmaṇa*, 14. 5. 2. 1.

16 *Complete Works*, VIII: 89.

17 Ibid., 274.

18 G. S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus* [Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964], 11-12, 14-15.

19 Ibid., 15-16.

20 This refers to the four stages of life according to Hindu tradition:

Māhākula-kulīnārya-sabhya-sajjana-sādhavaḥ; Brahmacārī gṛhī vānaprastho bhikṣuścatuṣṭaye (There are four stages of life: that of the celibate [brahmacharya], the householder [gārhasthya], the retired person [vānaprastha], and the renunciate [sannyāsa].) — *Amarakośa*, 2. 7. 3.

The injunction was: *Brahmacaryam parisamāpya gṛhī bhavet, gṛhī bhūtvā vanī bhavet, vanī bhūtvā pravrajet* (After completing one's studies, one could marry, then retire to the forest, then receive monastic vows.) — *Jābāla Upaniṣad*, 4.

Vaneṣu ca vidhṛtyaivam tṛtīyam bhāgamāyuṣaḥ; Caturthamāyuṣo bhāgam tyaktvā saṅgān parivrajet (After spending three-fourths of life according to the set pattern — student's life, householder's life, and retirement — one can receive monastic vows.) — *Manu Smṛti*, 2. 33.

But, the other option was: *Yadi vā itarathā brahmacaryādeva pravrajet gṛhād-vanād vā; Atha punaravratī vā vratī vā snātako vā utsannāgniko vā yadahareva virajet tadahareva pravajet* (If one has intense renunciation, one can as well renounce from whichever stage of life he is in.) — *Jābāla Upaniṣad*, 5.

[21] *Klṛpta-keśa-nakha-śmaśruḥ pātrī daṇḍī kusumbhavān; Vicarenniyato nityam sarvabhūtānyapīḍayan — Manu Smṛti*, 6.52.

[22] Have thou no home. What home can hold thee, friend?
The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed; and food
What chance may bring, well cooked or ill, judge not.
No food or drink can taint that noble Self
Which knows Itself. Like rolling river free
Thou ever be, Sannyāsin bold! Say—'Om Tat Sat, Om!'

— 'The Song of the Sannyāsin', *Complete Works*, IV: 395.

[23] *Brahmacārī bhaved varṇī gṛhastaḥ snātakaḥ tathā; Vaikhānaso vānaprasthaḥ karma-samnyāsako yatiḥ* — Halāyudha in *Abhidhāna-ratnamālā*, 2. 239.

[24] *Adhyātma-ratir-āsīno nirapekṣo nirāmiṣaḥ; Ātmanaiva sahāyena sukhārthī vicarediha. Dūṣito'pi caret dharmam yatra tatrāśrame rataḥ; Samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu na liṅgam dharma-kāraṇam — Manu Smṛti*, 6.49, 66.

[25] Shankara says in his Introduction to the *Gita*: *Dvividho hi vedokto dharmaḥ, pravṛtti-lakṣaṇo nivṛtti-lakṣaṇaśca* (Dharma is two-fold, says the Veda; one is indulgence in worldly activities and the other is renunciation). From what we observed above, it appears that there is decadance in both ideals. Hence an Avatar comes and restores the pristine glory of both *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*.

[26] *Sthāpakāya ca dharmasya sarvadharma svarūpiṇe.*

[27] Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1984], 919.

[28] Ibid., 926-27.

[29] Ibid., 1012.

[30] *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977], 450-51.

[31] Ibid., 451.

[32] Ibid., 461.

[33] *Complete Works*, VI: 254-55.

[34] Ibid., VIII: 89-90.

[35] Ibid., III:446.

[36] Ibid.

[37] *Na karmaṇā na prajayā dhanena tyāgenaike amṛtatvamānaśuḥ — Kaivalya Upaniṣad*, 2.

[38] *Gospel*, 179.

[39] Ibid., 291.

[40] Ibid., 387.

[41] Ibid., 688.

[42] *Complete Works*, III: 447.

[43] *Gospel*, 387.

[44] *Śeṣatvāt-puruṣārtha-vādo yathā'nyeṣviti jaiminiḥ.*
Ācāra-darśanāt. Tat-śruteḥ. Tadvato vidhānāt. Niyamāt-ca.
—*Brahma Sūtras*, 3.4.2,3,4,6,7.

[45] *Kurvanneveha karmāṇi jijīviṣet śatam samāḥ — Īśā Upaniṣad*, 2. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (1. 2. 12) says: '*Parīkṣya lokān karmacitān brāhmaṇo nirvedamāyāt nāstyakṛtaḥ kṛtena* (Having seen that all worldly activities lead to their effects of joy and sorrow, the intelligent one develops intense dispassion and declares that through works [with desires] one can never attain worklessness).

[46] *Parāmarśam jaiminiracodanā ca, apavadati hi — Brahma Sūtras*, 3. 4. 18.

[47] *Anuṣṭheyam bādarāyaṇaḥ, sāmya-sruteḥ — Brahma Sūtras*, 3. 4. 19.

[48] *Tulyam tu darśanam — Brahma Sūtras*, 3. 4. 9.

[49] *Kāmakāreṇa caike — Brahma Sūtras*, 3. 4. 15.

[50] *Yadeva vidyayā karoti śraddhayā upaniṣadā tadeva vīryavattaram bhavati — Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 1. 1. 10.

[51] *Asārvatrikī — Brahma Sūtras*, 3. 4. 10.

[52] *Upamardam ca — Brahma Sūtras*, 3. 4. 16.

[53] *Gospel*, 151.

[54] Ibid., 114.

[55] *Karmaṇaiva hi samsiddhim āsthithā janakādayaḥ — Gītā*, 3. 20.

[56] *The Great Master*, 939.

[57] *Gospel*, 524.

[58] *Complete Works*, VIII: 82.

[59] Quoted from Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983], 50.

[60] *Complete Works*, VI: 474.

[61] Ibid., VII: 64-65.

[62] Ibid., V: 53.

[63] Raimundo Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity* [New York: Seabury Press, 1982], 15.

[64] From his Foreword to Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission*, vii.

The Unique Balance Struck by the Math and the Mission

A MODEL FOR AN INTEGRAL SOCIETY

AMALENDU DAS GUPTA

The Balancing of the Two Wings

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION cannot be viewed in isolation from the Ramakrishna Math; the dual nature of the Ramakrishna Order is so finely integrated that the duality can hardly be perceived in its working. Yet there is, by definition, a certain tension between a contemplative spiritual core that demands total renunciation of the world and a socially active role that must entail a great deal of close involvement in the world's affairs. In principle there is no conflict in involvement without attachment when *jiva* is identified with — and served as — Shiva. But this cannot remove the distinctiveness of the Ramakrishna Order's twin identities, nor detract from its remarkable achievement in reconciling the two in a unique balance.

A perfect balance was not immediately forged at the beginning; there was occasional doubt, even difference. Though the idea of service was directly derived from the Master's own teachings, what inspired his young disciples more was his unremitting insistence on renunciation. They had hardly any other thought when they severed their worldly ties and formed the nucleus of the Ramakrishna Order at Baranagore soon after the passing away of the Master. They made a stirring affirmation of this spirit during a brief stay at the house of the future Swami Premananda at Antpur.

One winter night, gathered around an open-air fire of logs, they spent some time in meditation, after which Narendra began recounting the story of Christ, calling special attention to the life of renunciation that Jesus lived. He quoted in particular from the Gospel according to St. Matthew: 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.'[1] This was perfectly in tune with the mood of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, who discovered only later that it had been Christmas eve. They had already chosen a life of the utmost austerity. At Narendra's urging they pledged themselves to renounce all.

Jesus and Ramakrishna had been equally emphatic about the corrupting influence of worldly possessions; both warned against an attachment that stands between man and God. Jesus held it 'easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'[2] Ramakrishna too commented on the egotism and self-love that money breeds, on how 'possession of money makes such a difference in a man.'[3] He was impatient with the argument that one needed wealth to do good to others;[4] the plea was usually prompted by vanity or worse. And to a sannyāsi, he insisted, 'money is like poison';[5] the refrain of his teaching was against 'lust and gold'.

But when Swami Vivekananda had a direct encounter with the misery of the Indian masses during his travels through much of this land, he saw the desperate need for material means to alleviate this distress. His mission to the West was prompted at least partly by this realization. Yet, after the Ramakrishna Mission was founded on his return and the basis laid for steadily expanding humanitarian work, his brother monks did not find it easy to resolve the tension between their individual spiritual quest and organized social service. The quest tended to push them towards an ascetic disengagement from the world while any social commitment must draw them back. Recalling how the 'infant movement progressed through doubt and reassurance', Swami Gambhirananda's history of the Ramakrishna Order refers not merely to Swami Yogananda's open expression of doubt but also to an incident which is less widely known but no less significant.[6]

Almost immediately after its formation in 1897, the Ramakrishna Mission undertook famine relief in Murshidabad district and the monk in charge was Swami Akhandananda. He had no difficulty in carrying out this task as a way of serving God, but he could not bring himself to follow Swami Vivekananda's

instruction that reports of this work be sent to the Press for publication. The very idea of publicity was repugnant to him; and when, at Swami Brahmananda's insistence that Swamiji's wishes must be honoured, he sat down to write a report, he thought he could see, through tears in his eyes, Sri Ramakrishna telling him: 'Do you want me or the public?' He had to do what he had been asked to, but it took the world-renouncing monks a good deal of time and mental preparation to get used to the idea of a fresh involvement in the world's affairs, however selfless its nature. They had to accept much that seemed alien to a life of ascetic contemplation: for example, that service needed public support and the public must know what it would be asked to support.

The mental preparation must have called for a new form of self-discipline. There could be no dilution of the monastic ideal, no relaxation of the ascetic regime; but wide-ranging social interaction in the course of humanitarian service necessarily entailed frequent exposure to different ways of life. The way the Ramakrishna Order has fulfilled its increasing social responsibilities without any weakening of its spiritual aims and monastic norms has been an astonishing achievement over the first hundred years of its history. And no less remarkable has been its strict adherence to monastic ideals and norms without impairing its efficiency in the face of complex social tasks. On the contrary, the monks of the Ramakrishna Order have often shown — quite apart from their scrupulous honesty and unfailing dedication — a degree of organizational, managerial, and administrative ability that could well be the envy of professional specialists in different spheres of activity.

A Model for an Integral Society

This has always been an instructive part of the Ramakrishna Mission's record. It carries a special lesson today when efficiency is increasingly being held to be a function of material abundance, whether in incentives for and conditions of work or in technological support. This is part of a new materialist culture which does not have the ideological underpinnings of earlier forms of materialism. The philosophical arguments against an idealist view of reality have been replaced by a mad pursuit of material prosperity for its own sake. Never before has it been so widely and loudly proclaimed, even by former adherents of a creed that has traditionally denounced private wealth as a rotten

fruit of exploitation, that to get rich is glorious. And the thrift and industry of early capitalist enterprise have given place to an insatiable consumerist greed with a matching economic mechanism to satisfy and whet it at the same time.

The market economy that sustains the consumerist society does not have any ideological pretensions. Market forces do not distinguish between good and bad, or recognize anything as good or bad. Inherently amoral, they subvert traditional values, for whatever the market prefers must be accepted without question. This culture is an unprecedented threat not merely to the life of the spirit, but to all that constitutes the core of human civilization. And the threat is not restricted to societies where the market has yielded much affluence; it is potent also in a country like India where the majority of the people are mired in poverty and ignorance. The lure of ostentatious opulence seduces the poor as much as it does the rich.

The work that is untiringly being done by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order is an ennobling challenge to this trend, a breath of fresh air amidst the enveloping miasma of self-indulgence. It is work like this that keeps alive the belief that the struggle against the consumerist corruption of human societies need not be given up as lost. The example set by these monks is all the more effective because though they have renounced the world they have not withdrawn from it. It has an immediate relevance to other lives; indeed the Ramakrishna Order has shaped many lives through its educational and allied activities, and indirectly influenced many more drawn to it in other ways.

Even those who have not taken much interest in the ideals of the Ramakrishna Order need to take note of one lesson that its work holds for all. As I have already argued, the quality of this work is a standing refutation of the currently fashionable belief that efficiency at any high level of activity is invariably dependent on material facilities and incentives; an added requirement is believed to be elaborate technological support. This view is based on a naive extrapolation from special cases. While specialized operations on a large scale may profit decisively from technological innovations, and while financial incentives in advanced industrial societies are usually related to the value of the results obtained, these relationships do not necessarily apply in every kind of activity or situation. But honesty and understanding in the application of human resources are of inestimable value in all circumstances.

Both in its public activities and internal working, the Ramakrishna Mission has demonstrated what can be achieved by selfless dedication, mature judgement and total integrity in the use of the simplest or smallest of means. Even where the resources are large because of the nature of the work, their management has always been exemplary — but without the customary incentives to support it. The Order has remained true to its spiritual core in the midst of its continually expanding engagement with the affairs of the contemporary world. Its ascetic discipline has not lost its strength or validity under the so-called pressure of changing times; the alleged pressure is an unworthy excuse for a dilution of unchangeable principles.

References

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2 Ibid., Mark 10:25. Also, Matthew 19:24 and Luke 18:25.

3 *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1986], 169.

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Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature
A SURVEY

SWAMI NIKHILESWARANANDA

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA wrote to his Madras disciples from Chicago on 24 January 1894: 'My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of every body, and then let men and women settle their own fate.' It was in accordance with this plan that Swamiji established the Ramakrishna Mission Association on 1 May 1987. On 5 May 1897, a resolution was passed laying down its aims and objects.

As stated in this resolution, the chief aim of the Ramakrishna Mission is to spread those truths which Sri Ramakrishna had, for the good of humanity, taught and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental, and spiritual advancement. One of the well-known aspects of the above aim of the Mission is to prepare the ground for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms of one Eternal Religion. Its methods of action are:

- To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses;
- To promote and encourage arts and industries;
- And to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

In accordance with these ideals, the Ramakrishna Mission has been conducting various social service activities such as running schools, hospitals, etc., and also relief and rehabilitation work at times of natural calamities. These have already been discussed in the earlier articles of this volume. Thus, the great dream of Swamiji assumed a concrete form, and in the course of its 108 years of existence, the Ramakrishna Mission has coursed a long way through thick and thin. Having successfully completed the hundredth milestone and stepped into the 21st century, the time has now come to take stock of what has been achieved in the course of this long journey. In propagating the message of a great soul, literature is one of the best media. The term 'literature' conveys a vast meaning as it includes books, journals, pamphlets, etc. on and by the spiritual luminaries. Although spirituality is best transmitted through personal association, yet the literary medium plays no less important a role in the matter. The purpose of this article is to discuss the important role that the literary medium has played in spreading and sustaining the Ramakrishna Movement.

As we began this task of survey of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, we were bewildered by its magnitude. Thousands of books in various languages — English, French, Spanish, Russian, Japanese, Greek, Dutch, German, Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Marathi, etc. — have been published from various places throughout the world. To give a concrete shape to Swamiji's noble desire, religious periodicals are also being published in various languages spreading Vedantic and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideologies.

The Origin

Before going into the details, we must go back to the origin of this great literary movement: how Sri Ramakrishna's ideas began to be published. Sri Ramakrishna was against all forms of publicity. Nevertheless, the world-moving ideas that Sri Ramakrishna preached have pierced through the walls of his small room in the Dakshineswar temple premises and have spread all over the civilized world. Sri Ramakrishna himself once foretold of the spread of his universal message. He said:

> The power and ideas that are within his body will automatically spread all around in course of time. Hundreds of Himalayas will not be able to suppress that power.[1]

As far as we could gather, the news about Sri Ramakrishna was first published on 28 March 1875 in the English newspaper of Keshab Chandra Sen's Brahmo Samaj known as the *Indian Mirror* with these remarks:

> The never-ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he (Sri Ramakrishna) indulged are most of them as apt as they are beautiful.

The Bengali periodical *Dharma Tattva* gave the news of Sri Ramakrishna in Bengali for the first time on 14 May 1875. On 15 April 1876, the *Sunday Mirror* printed an essay based on the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna compiled by Pratap Chandra Majumdar. This article was reprinted in the *Theistic Quarterly Review* of October/December 1879.

During the lifetime of Sir Ramakrishna were published four books which dealt with him and his message. The first one, written by Keshab Chandra Sen in Bengali, came out on 24 January 1878 under the title *Paramahamser Ukti*. The second, also a Bengali compilation of the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, by Suresh Chandra Datta, came out on 23 December 1884 bearing the name *Paramahamsa Ramakrishna Ukti*. The second part of this book appeared in 1886. Later, in 1914, these two parts were combined into one volume with some additions and alterations, and a short biography of Sri Ramakrishna.

The third book was published by Ramchandra Datta in 1885 with the name *Tattvasār* (in Bengali), which was followed by another book by the same author under the title *Tattva Prakāshikā* (in Bengali), published on 20 June 1886. Apart from these books, some periodicals like *Dharma Tattva*, *Parichārikā*, etc. brought out articles on Sri Ramakrishna during his lifetime.

Shortly after Sri Ramakrishna passed away, Girish Chandra Sen of the Brahmo Samaj published on 24 January 1887 an English book named *Sri Ramakrishna's Life & Teachings*. The contents of this book were combined with those of the Bengali book by Keshab Chandra Sen mentioned above to form a new book entitled *Ādi Amritamaya Kathāmrita*, which came out on 25 February 1894 and is still in print. The first detailed life of Sri Ramakrishna was written by the householder disciple Ramchandra Datta under the title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna-Paramahamsa-dever Jivan-vrittānta* (in Bengali). It appeared in 1890. Edited versions of this book were reprinted several times later by the Udbodhan Office.

Between 1894 and 1901 Sri Akshay Kumar Sen wrote a book in verse form in four volumes on the life and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna in Bengali, known as *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi*.[2] Another book on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna by Satya Charan Mitra came out in 1897. In the same year *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by 'M' appeared for the first time in two volumes in English and enjoyed wide approbation. At the request of the readers, 'M' brought out the first volume of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* (in Bengali), which was serially published by Swami Trigunatitananda in the Bengali magazine *Udbodhan*. All the five volumes of the now renowned *Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* came out subsequently.

Mr. C. H. Tawney, the Principal of Presidency College, Calcutta, wrote an article (*Modern Hindu Saints*) on Sri Ramakrishna. This was published in the journals *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review* and *Colonial Records* in January 1896.

Next came out an article with the caption *A Real Mahatman* written by none other than Prof. Max Müller in the journal *The Nineteenth Century* in August 1896. Shortly thereafter, the famous book of the same author, *Ramakrishna — His Life and Sayings*, came out in November 1898. The *Brahmavadin* of Madras, started at the instance of Swamiji by his Madras disciples, also brought out the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna serially from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

In 1903, Swami Abhedananda compiled another book with 544 sayings of Sri Ramakrishna and published it from the Vedanta Society of New York. Next he edited *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (436 pages) in 1907 and brought it out from the same place. The same book, with its title changed to *Memoirs of Sri Ramakrishna*, was published in 1939 from the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta. M's original English text, revised by Swami Abhedananda, was published by Beacon Press, Boston, in 1947. Meanwhile, in 1942, Swami Nikhilananda translated the entire *Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* into English and published it from the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre of New York with all the talks arranged chronologically. The Ramakrishna Math, Madras, published the first Indian edition of this English book in 1944. An abridged edition of this book was published in 1948 under the title *Ramakrishna, the Prophet of New India* by Harper & Sons, New York and London. In 1951 Rider & Co. published yet another abridged edition of this book with a foreword by Aldous

Huxley. The Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre, New York, republished this book in 1958 and, later, in 1973.

The most detailed (although incomplete) account of the life of Sri Ramakrishna, especially of his earlier years as a *sādhaka*, was given by Swami Saradananda in his monumental work in Bengali known as *Sri Ramakrishna Lila-prasanga.* It was first serialized in part in the monthly journal *Udbodhan* in 1909, and brought out in book form between 1911 and 1919. It was translated into English in 1958 under the title *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master.* Another book in Bengali worth mentioning in this context is *Sri Sri Ramakrishnacharit* by Priyanath Sinha (a disciple of Swamiji, who wrote under the name Gurudas Barman). It came out in 1910. Swami Brahmananda's small book *Sri Sri Ramakrishna-Udbodhan* published in 1914-15 is valuable as it is the work of a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

Among the biographies of Sri Ramakrishna which are popular in modern times, the earliest one is the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, with a foreword by Mahatma Gandhi, which was published by Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, in 1924 and reprinted several times since. Three other books worth mentioning here are: *The Life of Ramakrishna* by Romain Rolland, which was first published in 1930, and has inspired hundreds of people in the West; *Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples* by Christopher Isherwood; and *Sri Ramakrishna, a Prophet for the New Age* by Richard Schiffman.

The rivulet of literature on Sri Ramkrishna swelled into a big river when Swami Vivekananda's lectures began to be published. Swamiji's interpretation of Vedantic scriptures, his exposition of the four yogas, his exhortations to his countrymen, and his views on the religious and socio-economic issues facing the modern world generated a new tide of spiritual fervour and social awareness in the West and in India. Single-handedly he created a new genre of religious literature which has now been adopted by hundreds of religious leaders and thousands of their followers all over the world. Swamiji's discourses on Rāja-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, Jñāna-Yoga, and Bhakti-Yoga began to be printed from 1895 in America and in England. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* was first published in 1907 in four volumes. Since then five more volumes have been added. The first comprehensive biography of Swami Vivekananda was published in four volumes between 1912 and 1918.

Literature on Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi is comparatively less. The teachings of the Holy Mother in the form of conversations were first published in two volumes in Bengali in 1925, five years after her passing away. The first detailed biography, *Sri Sarada Devi* (in Bengali), was brought out by Br. Akshayachaitanya in 1937. A very readable account of her life in English, written by Swami Tapasyananda, was published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, in 1940, which is still popular. Since then several other biographies in Bengali, English, and other languages have appeared.

Among the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the works of Swamis Abhedananda and Ramakrishnananda were published in the first decade of the twentieth century. The teachings of some of the remaining disciples also were published a few years after their passing away.

We shall now turn our attention to the bibliographies available on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature.

Bibliographies

Though a complete bibliography on the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature has not been prepared so far, we find at least partial bibliographies published from various places. Some of these are mentioned below.

In 1953 Brijendranath Bandopadhyay and Rajanikanta Das wrote a Bengali book (*Samasāmayik Drishtite Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa*) giving details of the books on Sri Ramakrishna. It mentions 4 books published before the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna and lists 25 books in Bengali published after his passing away; it also gives the details of 21 books published in English on him.

In 1964 the National Library of India compiled a bibliography of books on Swami Vivekananda available in its library, covering English and other Indian languages, to mark the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's Centenary Celebration. It provides a minimum of bibliographic detail arranged in alphabetical order according to the names of the authors. It is kept in the bibliographic section of the National Library for reference.

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture brought out a shorter bibliography in printed form in order to pay homage to Swami Vivekananda on the occasion of his 125th birth anniversary. It includes mainly books in two languages — English and Bengali. This small book consists of two parts. In

the first part has been arranged in alphabetical order the titles of the books, periodicals, etc. In the second part the list has been arranged in alphabetical order according to the names of the authors. The list includes 185 books in Bengali, 145 in English, and 38 in other Indian languages.

In 1995, the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Madras, published an annotated bibliography on Swami Vivekananda in two volumes compiled by Prof. B. Ramesh Babu. This bibliography covers works on and by Swami Vivekananda published up to 1994, which includes books, various proceedings, souvenirs, periodicals, articles, etc., and also furnishes full bibliographic details, subject headings, key words, and annotations. The first volume is divided into two parts. Part one consists of 544 entries and part two of 201 entries. Each part has been provided with author and key words/subject indexes. The second volume, which deals with periodicals and articles, consists of 1,688 entries and provides the author and key words/subject indexes, which facilitate easy retrieval of information. The limitation of this bibliography is that it is restricted only to English language publications. Besides, it covers only books on and by Swami Vivekananda.

A bibliography in Bengali on the books of Swami Vivekananda was published in 1963 in the form of a book named *Vishva Vivek*. This includes books published only up to 1962, and covers books only on and by Swami Vivekananda. It gives details of the names of the books, names of authors, names of publishers, years of publication, and the number of pages. The entries are related to books only. Periodicals and other material have not been included in it. The entries include 175 books in English and 187 books in Bengali, 8 books in Burmese, 1 in Danish, 4 in Dutch, 2 in Finnish, 28 in French, 15 in German, 2 in Greek, 6 in Italian, 2 in Japanese, 5 in Polish, 2 in Portuguese, 7 in Russian, 25 in Spanish, 1 in Swedish, 1 in Nepali, 1 in Singhalese, 2 in Assamese, 9 in Urdu, 14 in Oriya, 41 in Kannada, 34 in Gujarati, 30 in Tamil, 29 in Telugu, 3 in Punjabi, 12 in Marathi, 28 in Malayalam, 4 in Sanskrit, and 88 in Hindi. Thus a total of 867 books on and by Swami Vivekananda in 17 foreign and 13 Indian languages has been included in the bibliography.

A complete bibliography on the literature of the Ramakrishna Order should cover books on and by Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, books written by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order on various subjects in the light of the

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology, and translation of scriptures in various languages published by the various branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission keeping in view the ideology of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Articles published on the above subjects in various journals should also be included in this bibliography. The preparation of such a bibliography is not an easy task because there is no single library where all the books and journals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology published so far from the branches of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and by outside publishers in all the languages are available. The library at Belur Math houses many old books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology, which are not available elsewhere. But recently many publishers have started publishing books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology, all of which do not find entry in the Belur Math library. Many such books are available in the library of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta. But since this library was started later, some of the old books are missing. There is no central place from where all the records related to books and journals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology can be obtained. In view of this the preparation of a complete bibliography on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature is a difficult task, and to prepare even a short survey of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in absence of such a bibliography or such basic data is not a very easy job.

In view of the above, all the major publishers, the branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission as well as outside publishers, were sent a questionnaire requesting them to give some details regarding their publications. Most of the publishers took the trouble of replying to all the questions in the questionnaire. Based on the replies received from them the annexes have been prepared in which the details regarding publications of the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission as well as the publications by outside publishers have been compiled. Similarly, the information on journals has also been compiled on the basis of replies received from various publishers and has been put in the annexes to this article.

Publication Centres of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature

Annexe-I gives a list of 29 publication centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission engaged in publishing books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideo-

logy in different languages. According to the recent notification of May 2005 issued by the Belur Math, only its few selected centres would henceforth be eligible for printing books. However, special mention must be made of the following centres and the number of books they currently (2005) publish:

Ramakrishna Math, Madras (the largest publisher):	292 titles in English, 333 in Tamil, 196 in Telugu, and 17 in Sanskrit/English;
Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati:	182 titles in English, 53 in Hindi, 46 in Sanskrit/English, and 2 in Nepali;
Udbodhan, Calcutta:	416 titles in Bengali, 14 in English, 3 in Hindi;
RKM Institute of Culture, Calcutta:	98 titles in English, 31 in Bengali, 1 in Oriya, and 2 in Hindi;
Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur:	174 titles in Marathi & 161 in Hindi;
Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur:	208 in Malayalam and 17 in English;
Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore:	265 titles in Kannada
Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore:	23 in Kannada, 54 in English, and 5 in Sanskrit
Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot:	161 in Gujarati, and 10 in English
Ramakrishna Mission, Coimbatore:	2 in English and 19 in Tamil

Most of the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission publish souvenirs, annual reports, booklets, etc. Apart from the branch centres of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, many other publishers are also engaged in publishing Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. Annexe-II gives the list of five such major publishers.

Journals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Ideology

Swami Vivekananda was very much interested in starting journals to spread the ideas of Practical Vedanta and the message of Sri Ramakrishna. He inspired Alasinga Perumal of Madras to start journals in English and encouraged his own brother-disciple Swami Trigunatitananda to start a journal in Bengali. Among the journals started during the lifetime of Swami Vivekananda were:

Brahmavadin, *Pacific Vedantin* (from USA), and *Prabuddha Bharata*, all in English, and *Udbodhan* in Bengali. Some of these journals are still thriving after 100 years. Annexe-III gives the list of periodicals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology being published by the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission along with other relevant details. Special mention must be made of the journals *Prabuddha Bharata*, *Vedanta Kesari* and *Udbodhan*. *Prabuddha Bharata* was started by Alasinga Perumal and Dr. Nanjunda Rao at the instance of Swami Vivekananda with B. Rajam Iyer as the editor. It was published from Madras from July 1896 to June 1898. Then the journal had to be discontinued because of the untimely death of its editor. Later, with the help of Capt. Sevier, the journal was republished from Almora in August 1898 where it continued till March 1899 when the editorial office was shifted to the newly started Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati. Since April 1899 it has been published from Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. It is the oldest journal in English of its kind being published in India. The *Vedanta Kesari* was started in 1914 and is being published by the Ramakrishna Math, Madras. *Udbodhan*, a journal in Bengali, was started in 1899 by Swami Trigunatitananda, a brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda. It has completed its 100 years of service and is the oldest journal of its kind being published in Bengali without any break. At present (in October 2005) it has 67,500 subscribers and an annual turnover of Rs. 1.55 crores.

Annexe-IV gives the list of periodicals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology, which were started but could not continue for some reason or the other. Annexe-V gives the list of 8 periodicals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology being published by various publishers other than the branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. We have listed here only the journals which are published on a regular basis. Apart from these, many other publishers are engaged in publishing journals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology occasionally. The main theme of the next article is 'Journals of the Ramakrishna Order', where the history of the early years of the Order's three journals has been discussed.

Impact of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature

An idea of the magical influence of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature can be gained from the fact that millions of copies of *The Gospel of Sri Rama-*

krishna have been already sold in India and abroad in various languages — Bengali, English, German, Greek, Japanese, French, Spanish, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Oriya, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, etc. A few years ago, when the copyright restriction on the Bengali original of this book expired, there was a virtual scramble for reprinting the book, and about sixteen publishing houses jumped into the fray, which created a stir in the publishing world. A periodical at that time carried an interesting article entitled 'Ramakrishna outsells Karl Marx', which revealed that a large number of copies worth Rs. 45,00,000 were sold in just 45 days. The article read: 'The sale of *Kathāmrita* from 1 January to 14 February (1983) surpassed the total sale of Marxist literature in West Bengal in the preceding three years.'[3]

The impact produced by the works of Swami Vivekananda has been beautifully expressed by the French savant Romain Rolland: 'His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel Choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock.'[4]

Commenting on the literature produced by the Ramakrishna Mission, Harold W. French, in his book entitled *The Swan's Wide Waters*, writes: 'No recent movement in the Indian religious tradition has exhibited the intellectual virility of the Ramakrishna Movement.... Its apologists have been many and their literary output voluminous, if uneven in its intellectual weight.'[5] In America a publisher told a bookseller, 'I sell a million books that don't change people's lives; the books from the Vedanta Press do not sell as well but they do change people's lives.'

Great thinkers, historians, managers, executives, teachers, students, and all sections of the society are influenced by the electrifying message of Swami Vivekananda. People of all types, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, or nationality, are benefiting from Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in various ways.

Nicholas De Roerich, the world famous artist, was greatly influenced by the ideas of Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and he considered Sri Ramakrishna's teachings very important for our own time. He said: 'The names of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and the glorious host of their followers remain on the most remarkable pages of the history of the spiritual culture of India.

The astounding depth of thought, which is characteristic of India, the beautiful manifestation of Guru and Chela remind the whole world of best ideas.'[6]

Arnold J. Toynbee, one of the eminent historians of our times, was very much agitated seeing the horrors of the World War, and he became dejected until he came in contact with the literature of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He then became hopeful about the bright future of mankind and wrote in the foreword to the book *Sri Ramakrishna and His Unique Message*: 'At this supremely dangerous moment in human history the only way of salvation for mankind is the Indian way. The Emperor Ashoka's and Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religion, here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family — and in the atomic age this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.'[7]

Amaury De Reincourt, a well-known scientist and writer, pointed out in his book *The Eye of Shiva* the unique contribution made by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda to the establishment of the harmony between Eastern mysticism and Western science: 'From its modern awakening with Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, Eastern mysticism has begun to adopt its revelation to the entirely different cultural framework provided by science and technology without in any way sacrificing what is followed in its traditional understanding of the phenomenon itself.'[8]

Pitirim A. Sorokin, the Harvard sociologist, wrote: 'A successful growth of Sri Ramakrishna and of the Vedanta Movements in the West is one of many symptoms of two basic processes which are going on at the present time in the human universe. One of these changes is the epochal shift of the creative centre of mankind from Europe to the larger area of the Pacific-Atlantic, while the other consists in a double process of continued decay of sensate culture and society and of the emergence and growth of the new — integral or ideational — socio-cultural order.'[9]

The great historian Will Durant writes in his famous book *The Story of Civilization*: 'He [Swami Vivekananda] preached to his countrymen a more virile creed than any Hindu had offered them since Vedic days.'[10]

The famous historian A. L. Basham gave a prominent place to Swami Vivekananda in the history of the world. According to him: 'Even now, a hundred years after the birth of Narendranath Datta, who later became Swami

Vivekananda, it is very difficult to evaluate his importance in the scale of the world history. It is certainly far greater than any Western historian or most Indian historians would have suggested at the time of his death. The passing of the years and the many stupendous and unexpected events which have occurred since then suggests that in centuries to come he will be remembered as one of the main moulders of the modern world, especially as far as Asia is concerned.... I believe also that Vivekananda will always be remembered in the world history because he virtually initiated what the late Dr. C.E.M. Joad once called the counter-attack from the East. Since the days of the Indian missionaries who travelled in South East Asia and China preaching Buddhism and Hinduism more than a thousand years earlier, he was the first Indian religious preacher to make an impression outside India.'[11]

Muhammad Daud Rahbar, a professor at Boston University, USA, was charmed by the personality of the unsophisticated Sri Ramakrishna and felt that in this scientific age the spiritual genius of Sri Ramakrishna is very much needed. He says: 'The autonomy of science and intellect has been overdone. The time has arrived when forces of spirit have to be released.... Was not unsophisticated Sri Ramakrishna a gifted scientist in his own right? In his blissful life we find a happy union of religion and science.'[12]

Claude Alan Stark deeply studied the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and found in them the solution to the problem of religious plurality, which remains an important factor in the division of mankind today. In his book *God of All* he said: 'Sri Ramakrishna's approach to the dilemma of religious plurality has been documented as an exposition of his experience of God-consciousness in different religious traditions. It is hoped that this exposition in and of itself represents a contribution to inter-religious understanding.'[13]

Many other scholars and thinkers have been influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology. To name a few, in the field of physical science — Albert Oppenheimer, Erwin Schrödinger, Sir Arthur Eddington, Harlow Shapley, James Houston Shrader, Dana L. Farnsworth; in the field of social science — Pitirim A. Sorokin, Robert Ulich, Hobart Mowrer, Gordon W. Allport, etc. Many Christian religious thinkers like Rudolf Otto, Joachim Wach, Edwin Booth, Walter H. Clerk, George William, and others have also been impressed by Sri Ramakrishna's message of the harmony of religions.

Impact of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature on the Freedom Movement of India

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature exerted tremendous influence on a whole generation of nationalist leaders and patriotic youths including those who sacrificed their lives at the altar of the motherland. Government records of those days show that police raids on the houses of individual revolutionaries and offices of secret societies invariably revealed books of Swami Vivekananda in their possession. The Government once even considered the proposal of proscribing *Patrāvali* (Letters) of Swami Vivekananda.[14]

Many revolutionaries and patriots of India derived their inspiration from the books of Swami Vivekananda. Mahatma Gandhi acknowledged in his speech at Belur Math on 6 February 1921 that his patriotism became a thousand-fold by reading the books of Swami Vivekananda.

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the second President of India, said that he and his friends used to exchange letters in which they would quote from the *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* because the British Government used to look upon young people with suspicion if they carried that book.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first Prime Minister, was profoundly influenced by the speeches and writings of Swamiji. In his famous book *The Discovery of India*, he wrote: 'Rooted in the past and full of pride in India's prestige, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life's problems and was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present.'

Rabindranath Tagore recommended the books of Swami Vivekananda to the French savant Romain Rolland saying: 'If you want to know India, study Swami Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative.'

Sri Aurobindo was greatly influenced by the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. According to him, 'The visit of Swami Vivekananda to America and the subsequent work of those who followed him did more for India than a hundred London Congresses could affect.'

The great revolutionary patriot Bal Gangadhar Tilak had hosted Swami Vivekananda during his *parivrājaka* days and also went to meet him at Belur Math afterwards. He wrote in his Marathi journal *Kesari* on 8 July 1902: 'It is doubtful if there is any Hindu who does not know the name of Sri Vivekananda Swami.... It was Swami Vivekananda who first held aloft

the banner of Hinduism as a challenge against the material science of the West.'

Subhash Chandra Bose, speaking on the influence of the writings of Swami Vivekananda on him, said: 'Though the Swami never gave any political message, everyone who came in contact with him or his writings developed a spirit of patriotism and political mentality. So far at least as Bengal is concerned, Swami Vivekananda may be regarded as the spiritual father of the modern nationalist movement.'[15] He also said: 'It is very difficult to explain the versatile genius of Swami Vivekananda. The impact of Swami Vivekananda made on the students of our time by his work and speeches far outweighed that made by any other leader of the country.'[16]

According to Vinoba Bhave, the term 'Daridra Narayana' was coined by Swami Vivekananda and popularized by Gandhiji.[17]

C. Rajagopalachari, the only Indian Governor General of independent India, wrote in the Foreword to the *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume*: 'Swami Vivekananda saved Hindusim and saved India. But for him we would have lost our religion and would not have gained our freedom. We, therefore, owe everything to Swami Vivekananda.'

The famous historian of India, R. C. Majumdar, writes about the impact of Swami Vivekananda on Indian nationalism: 'Swami Vivekananda, though an ascetic, was a patriot of patriots. He gave spiritual basis to Indian nationalism. The lessons of Vedanta and *Bhagavad Gita* permeated the lives and activities of many nationalists, and many a martyrs, inspired by his teachings, endured extreme sufferings and sacrifice with a cheerful heart, and fearlessly embraced death and calmly bore the inhuman tortures, worse than death, which were sometimes inflicted upon them.'[18]

Impact of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature on Great Writers

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature has greatly influenced the writers and poets of various languages all over the world. In Bangladesh many scholars and writers, who are mostly university professors belonging to different communities — Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist — have written articles on Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. In a textbook of Dhaka University, *The Philosophers of Bengal*, the writer Prof. Aminal Islam, Dean, Arts Faculty, has introduced a chapter on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

The influence of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature on writers and thinkers in West Bengal is so pervasive and deep that it would need a separate article to deal with it. So we are not attempting to discuss it here.

Among the modern authors in English, who came under the spell of the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the names of Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, and Gerald Heard are well known. There are quite a few others too.

Impact on French Writers

Romain Rolland was not only the most important French writer but also the most important Western writer to come under the influence of the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. His *Life of Ramakrishna* and *Life of Vivekananda* (originally published in one volume) introduced the lives of the two great personages to thousands of people in the West. Another French national who helped the spread of the Ramakrishna Movement in the French-speaking world through translation work is Jean Herbert.

In this context, the names of Prof. Masson-Oursell, professor of Indian philosophy at Sorbonne University, and Marcel Sauton, a scholar, deserve mention as two staunch supporters of Ramkrishna Movement before the Second World War. The most remarkable contribution to French literature was made by Swami Siddheswarananda, who founded a centre in Gretz near Paris. His book *Sri Ramakrishna and Harmony of Religions* in French inspired Solange Leemaitre to publish a book in French in which Sri Ramakrishna's teachings were highlighted. Swami Siddheswarananda's lectures on 'Indian Thought and Carmelite Mysticism' and 'Meditation According to Yoga-Vedanta', etc. introduced Ramakrishna Movement to the French academic world. After his passing away in 1957, Swami Nityabodhananda carried on his work by writing original books in French.

Impact on Spanish Writers

Amado Nervo (1870-1919), the great Mexican poet and writer and one of the most famous writers of all times in Spanish literature, was so much delighted on receiving the gift of a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

from the Vedanta Society of Buenos Aires, Argentina, that he wrote in his letter of 30 July 1916 to the Society: 'You have made me a very valuable present by sending 7 books. All of them are really nice, but I must say the admirable *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which has been a real revelation for me, excels them all.... From today it will be one of the books at my bedside, one of those which I carry with me everywhere.' Ricardo Güiraldes (1886-1927) was one of the leading writers of Argentina. In the preface of his famous book *El Sendero*, his wife Adelina Del Carril wrote: 'Güiraldes longed for the real sources of oriental spiritual wisdom. The aphorisms of Patanjali commented on by Swami Vivekananda made a well-aimed impact on his feelings and understanding and he was fascinated by them. The same deep impression was created by the abridged *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The unity of God and His creation is the great message for this age.'

Impact on Russian Writers

The great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy was greatly impressed by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. According to Alexander Shiffmann, 'Among the Indian philosophers of medieval period he (Tolstoy) studied more thoroughly Shankara and among the more recent Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his pupil Swami Vivekananda.' Tolstoy's acquaintance with Swami Vivekananda's philosophy dates back to September 1896 when for the first time he noted in his diary that he had read 'a charming book of Indian wisdom' which had been sent to him. Once Tolstoy praised Swami Vivekananda for his 'excellent polemics with Schopenhauer about God' and he commented on the English of Swami Vivekananda: 'What English has Vivekananda! He has learnt all its subtleties.' In March 1990, while preparing a list of new popular books, Tolstoy also included in it a plan for the publication of the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. In April of the same year he informed the orientalist M.O. Elinhorn, 'We are preparing a publication of selected thoughts of Vivekananda whom I appreciate very much.' However, this publication did not materialize. Tolstoy met the famous Czech thinker, statesman, and revolutionary, Jan Massaryk, and, among other things, asked him if he was reading Indian philosophy. Tolstoy told Massaryk that the greatest philosopher of modern India is Vivekananda.[19]

E. P. Chelishev, a well-known scholar of Russia, who has devoted a major part of his life to the study of the literature of Swami Vivekananda, says: 'Reading and re-reading the works on Vivekananda each time I find in them something new that helps deeper to understand India, its philosophy, the way of the life and customs of the peoples in the past and the present, their dream of the future.... I think Vivekananda's greatest service is the development in his teaching of the lofty ideals of humanism, which incorporate the finest features of Indian culture.... In my studies of contemporary Indian literature I had more than once had the opportunity to see what great influence the humanistic ideals of Vivekananda have exercised on the works of many writers.'[20] In an interview he said: 'I am very fond of Vivekananda's writings. I like them very much.... They are not only my favourite; the name of Vivekananda is very popular in Soviet Russia for a fairly long time.... We, the Soviet people, feel that Vivekananda's thoughts, his message and work are the treasures of not only India but of the whole world as well.'[21]

Impact on Chinese Writers

Prof. Huang Xin Chuan, a member of the Chinese Academic and Social Science, and Director, Institute of Asia Specific Studies, Beijing, has been greatly impressed by the writings of Swami Vivekananda. During his visit to India in 1992, he said: 'Vivekananda stands out as the most well-known philosopher and social figure of modern India. His philosophical thoughts and epic patriotism not only inspired the growth of nationalist movement in India but also made a great impact abroad.' He has written articles on Swami Vivekananda. Some books of Swami Vivekananda have also been translated into the Chinese language.

Impact on Gujarati Writers

Swami Ananda (pre-monastic name Himatlal Ramchandra Dave) was born in Siyani, a village of Saurashtra, in 1887, studied up to the 3rd standard, and came into contact with the Ramakrishna Mission in 1899 at the age of 13. He wanted to join the Ramakrishna Math also. But he could not formally join the Order. Later on he worked with Mahatma Gandhi and wrote 20 books and

established himself as a popular writer in Gujarati. In 1969 his book *Kul Kathai* won the Sahitya Akademy award, but he returned the prize following the monastic tradition. Till the last day of his life, i.e. 25 January 1976, he was engaged in spreading Ramakrishna-Vivekananada ideology through his books and letters, and he called himself a Hindu missionary of Ramakrishna.

Manilal Nabhubhai Dvivedi (1868-1898), who has contributed immensely towards Vedic literature in Gujarati, came in personal contact with Swami Vivekananda in 1891-92 at Nadiad. Many other writers like Sundaram, Markran Dave, Chunilal Madia, Manubhai Pancholi (Darshak), Sri Suresh Dalal, Dr. Bhjolabhai Patel, Ms Jyotiben Thanaki, and Sri Yashwant Shukla have been influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature and have written books and articles on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. The famous Gujarati poet Usnas has recently written a book in verse based on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna contained in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. It was serialised in the Gujarati monthly *Sri Ramakrishna Jyot* but has not yet been published in book form. The famous political leader and popular writer in Gujarati, Sri Kanaiyalal M. Munshi (1887-1971), who has written more than 60 books, was greatly impressed by Swami Vivekananda's literature. He said: 'Few can understand, unless they belong to my age group, the great influence which Swami Vivekananda had on us in the first decade of the twentieth century. He is one of the greatest architects of our renaissance. Swami Vivekananda made us India-conscious.'[22]

Kakasaheb Kalelkar (1885-1987), a popular writer in Gujarati and Marathi, has written many books and articles, and all of them have been compiled into a series of volumes called *Kakasaheb Kalelkar Granthavali*. He was greatly influenced by the literature of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Sister Nivedita, and said about the influence of Swami Vivekananda: 'Influence of his teachings grew on me as I grew in years and I look upon the Swami as a high water mark of Indian culture.'[23]

Impact on Hindi Writers

Among the Hindi writers who were influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature and contributed immensely to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in Hindi, the first name is Suryakant Tripathi, popularly known as

Nirala (1896-1961). He first came into contact with Swami Premananda, a brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda. Later on he also came in contact with Swami Saradananda, another brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda, and took initiation from him. His life underwent a transformation through his contact with the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna as well as the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. At the instance of Sri Hazariprasad Dvivedi, Swami Madhavananda requested him to become the editor of the Hindi periodical *Samanvaya* in 1921. After some hesitation he accepted the editorship and brought out many articles on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in this periodical.

The famous poet Pandit Sumitranandan Pant (1900-1976) came under the spell of Swami Vivekananda's books. He translated many poems by Swami Vivekananda and helped in the translation of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* into Hindi from English.

It is known that the famous Hindi novelist Premchand (1880-1936) was greatly influenced by the literature of Swami Vivekananda, particularly *His Call to the Youth* for serving the poor and downtrodden people. In his famous books, *Godan*, *Sevashrama*, *Rangbhoomi*, *Karmabhoomi*, etc., the teachings of Swami Vivekananda are reflected.

Another Hindi literary genius, Sri Hazariprasad Dvivedi, was also influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. He was particularly influenced by the life of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and exhorted the India women to follow her life. Acharya Mahavirprasad Dvivedi, Ramachandra Shukla, Sri Ramdhari Singh Dionkar, Agneya, Sri Fanishwar Nath Rennu and many other laurels of Hindi literature came under the influence of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature and contributed a number of articles to it. Sri Agneya also translated the life of Swami Vivekananda written by the French savant Romain Rolland into Hindi, which was published in 1968. Sardar Purna Singh, referred to by many as one of the best writers, was greatly impressed when he saw Swami Vivekananda for the first time in Lahore in 1897. He was greatly charmed by his powerful message and tried to reflect the teachings of Swami Vivekananda in his own writings. Sri Fanishwar Nath Rennu's life was transformed after coming in contact with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. He became a devotee and started visiting the Patna centre of the Ramakrishna Mission regularly. In his novels he has referred to the dramatic effect of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda on his life.

Impact on Marathi Writers

It is surprising that the first biography of Swami Vivekananda was written and published even while he was alive, and that too in Marathi. It was compiled by Sri Krishnaji Narayan Athalye (1852-1927), editor of the popular Marathi monthly *Kerala Kokila*, running into 340 pages and serialized in five issues of the journal between 1899 and 1900. In the July 1900 issue of the journal, the author gave an eyewitness account of the events at Madras just before Swamiji left for his second visit to the West. After Swami Vivekananda's passing away on 4 July 1902, the *Kerala Kokila* published a very touching obituary note in its issue of May 1902 (for some reason the journal was running three months behind schedule). Apart from this note, two more poems were published on Swami Vivekananda in the pages of the *Kerala Kokila*. In 1912, Athalye brought out a new biography of Swami Vivekananda containing some 166 pages. In 1917, he also published a rendering of *My Master* (a lecture delivered by Swami Vivekananda). Sri Athalye came across the books of Swami Vivekananda in 1897 and was so impressed with them that he started publishing Marathi renderings in his popular monthly. First he published the *Rāja-Yoga* series, and then he also published various Marathi renderings of Swami Vivekananda's lectures, conversations, poems, interviews, etc. through the pages of his journal and also in book form. He was extremely fascinated by the words of Swami Vivekananda and tried to get a personal audience with him, but unfortunately had to rest content with only seeing him. Through his hard work he became a pioneer in spreading Swami Vivekananda's message in the Marathi language.

Sri Jagannathram Tullu composed a life of Swami Vivekananda in poetic form in 502 verses. This 44-page booklet was published on 15 November 1902.[24] Another popular Marathi writer, Mama Warerkar (1883-1964), was also greatly influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. He has written about 176 highly appreciated works in Marathi. He was also for some years an editor of the magazine *Duniya*. He was regarded as a trendsetter in the field of drama. In 1956 the Government of India conferred on him the title 'Padma-bhushan' and nominated him as a member of Rajya Sabha. Very few know that this outstanding littérateur genius of Maharashtra owes his inspiration to Swami Vivekananda, because Swami Vivekananda's influence made him what he was. He had gone to Almora to meet Swami Vivekananda in 1898 with the

purpose of becoming a monk, but having learnt that he was already married, Swami Vivekananda lovingly advised him not to become a sannyāsin. He encouraged him to follow the householder's life and blessed him profusely. Swami Vivekananda introduced him to Girishchandra Ghosh, a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and told Girishchandra Ghosh: 'This boy is born to carry on your work. I entrust him to you. Let him be your successor.' And Girishchandra Ghosh accepted Mama Warerkar as his own son. In many of the works of Mama Warerkar we find an echo of the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. About his own drama *Sannyāsāchā Sansāra*, Mama Warerkar said: 'While writing this drama I made use of my discussion with Swami Vivekananda during my short stay with him. He never looked down upon other religions but was proud of his own religion. I began this drama with a song in his praise, and, as luck would have it, I got a character that closely resembled Swamiji.'[25]

Impact on Kannada Writers

Many stalwarts of Kannada literature have been influenced by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature and have authored many books on Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Among them is the recipient of the Gnānapitha award K. V. Puttuppa, the greatest Kannada poet in modern times, who was a disciple of Mahapurush Maharaj. Through his writings he made Ramakrishna and Vivekananda household names in Karnataka. Mysore University has instituted a chair for Vivekananda studies. Several books on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in Kannada language have been prescribed as textbooks by some of the universities and by the Board of School Education in the State. D. V. Gundappa, a writer of great eminence in the Kannada language, says: 'One of the yeoman services that the Ramakrishna Order rendered to the world is the publication of its literature. Bringing out authoritative English translations of the scriptures and selling them at an attractive price is not an ordinary service. Besides, publishing authentic lives and messages of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, which read like living commentaries on the entire thought of sages of yore, is highly commendable. As far as Kannada language is concerned, I can easily say that the entire Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature is available in Kannada.'

Prof. K.S. Nisar Ahmed, a noted contemporary Kannada poet, writes about the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in Kannnada language: 'Among the independent work, special mention must be made of Masti Venkatesha Iyengar (recipient of Gnānapitha award), Kuvempu (K.V. Puttuppa), a national poet and Gnānapitha award winner, and G.R. Diwakar. Besides, the translations of the source books like *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* and *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanavali* published from Ramakrishna Ashrama (Mysore) have been highly emotionally appealing and have tremendously influenced many people. They have won the admiration of the Kannada public.'

Impact on Tamil Writers

Sri Subramanya Bharati (1882-1921), well known as a morning star of modern Tamil literature, a poet, a seer, and a great patriot, was greatly influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. Many a time in his writings Bharati declared that Sri Ramakrishna was the maker of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Vivekananda was the foremost maker of modern India. In sweet and simple Tamil, which was understandable by all, he serialized the biography of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the journal edited by him. The parables and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna were widely used in all his writings, whether on politics, philosophy, religion, or on other subjects. Extracts from the talks and speeches of Swami Vivekananda were freely used in many of the articles on social reform and politics. Keeping Swami Vivekananda's ideas as his base, he wrote an exhaustive commentary in Tamil on *Pātanjala Yoga Sūtra*. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna lie buried in many of the stories written by him. For example, in his long story *Chandri Kayin Kathai*, the jivanmukta state of Sri Ramakrishna has been described. In 1905, during his visit to Calcutta, he met Sister Nivedita and was so much influenced by her that he dedicated the first two volumes of his patriotic poems *Swadesh Geetangal* (1908) and *Janmabhumi* (1909) to her.

In an article for the journal *Chakravarthini* — a women's magazine — Bharati wrote about Swamiji and called him 'Srimad Swami Vivekananda Paramahamsa'. In this article he narrated in beautiful Tamil how Sri Ramakrishna completely changed the life of the young Narendranath Datta and made him blossom into Swami Vivekananda.

The immensity of influence exerted by Swami Vivekananda on the mind of this great poet can be gauged by the lofty remarks made by him: 'There is no subject on which Swami Vivekananda has not thought. There is no scripture he is not familiar with. The course of his intellect knows no impediment. His courage knows no limit. After Sri Krishna, it is Vivekananda who has explained, in a language everyone can understand, the true importance of Hinduism. It is Vivekananda who was responsible for initiating the renaissance of Hindu Dharma.'[26]

Impact on Malayalam Writers

The great poet Kumaran Asan (1873-1974) was one of the three great creators of the golden age of Malayalam literature, the other two being Ulloor S. Parameshwara Iyer (1879-1949) and Vallathol Narayana Menon (1875-1968). These three poets are popularly known as Asan, Ulloor, and Vallanthol respectively. All of them were influenced by Swami Vivekananda. However, this influence was most prominent on Asan — the first great creative genius to come from a socially backward class in modern Kerala.

In 1903, Narayana Guru (1857-1928) started 'Sri Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana Yogam' (SNDP). Dr. Palpu, a highly placed officer in the native state of Mysore, became the Chief Organiser, and Asan, his first Secretary. The primary objective of this organization was all-round reform and development of the backward Eazhava community. For fifteen years Asan worked as its Secretary. In 1923 he became the President. He also edited the journal *Vivekodayam*.

It is interesting to note that Swami Vivekananda played an important part in the formation of SNDP, a great movement of Kerala. During his *parivrājaka* days in 1892, Swami Vivekananda met Dr. Palpu at Mysore and, after hearing about the inhuman caste system and the insults and injustices suffered by the lower castes at the hands of the upper caste Hindus, suggested to him: 'Find a good sannyāsin from your own community, place him at the centre, and organize lower castes to uplift them.' After this Dr. Palpu returned to his home state, Travancore, and discovered Narayana Guru. The trend of the reform activities undertaken by Narayana Guru followed more or less the line determined by Swami Vivekananda.

Kumaran Asan was influenced greatly by Narayana Guru as well as by Swami Vivekananda. His books *Duravastha*, *Chandala*, *Bhikshuki*, and *Vasava Datta* revive an echo of the ideas of Swami Vivekananda on caste, education, and reforms, etc. Not only on burning social issues but also on deeper philosophical problems of existence, Swami Vivekananda's influence can be seen in Asan's writings. He tried to popularize Swami Vivekananda's writings through SNDP's journal *Vivekodayam*, which he edited. He translated, among others, three books of Swami Vivekananda — *Karma-yoga*, *Bhakti-yoga*, and *Rāja-yoga* — and two poems — 'To a Friend' and 'Let Shyama Dance There'.[27]

Apart from Asan, Ullor, and Vallathol, many other eminent writers and poets of Kerala were influenced by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology and have contributed to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in Malayalam. The great poet Kuttamath has composed the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna (as compiled by Swami Brahmananda) in 1024 verses and has written the poems *Gadadhar* and *Renunciation of Narendra*. The popular poet P. Kunhiraman Nayar has written a long poem concerning the Vivekananda Rock at Kanyakumari. Appan Thampuran, the Prince of Cochin, has written a poem in Malayalam based on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Apart from these, many books have been translated into Malayalam.[28]

Salient Features of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature

1. It is non-sectarian, non-political in nature, and negative ideas against any religion or sect or community are not projected in this literature.
2. It has maintained high standards in terms of language as well as literary value. Some of the books are prescribed as textbooks, including *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* in Bengali.
3. It is equally appealing to the intellectuals as well as the masses.
4. Authenticity is given an important place in the literature. Only authentic material is published in books and journals published by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Miracle mongering, stories based on hearsay, etc. are avoided.
5. The span of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature is very wide. It covers a wide range of subjects including philosophy, religion, psychology, self-development, mysticism, etc.

6. Even though it is firmly founded on ancient knowledge and wisdom, it is modernistic in approach.
7. Many Sanskrit scriptures have been translated into various languages in line with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology and published by the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.
8. Many books on mysticism and practical spirituality having great depth have been published by the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in various languages, viz. *The Eternal Companion*, *Meditation and Spiritual Life*, *For Seekers of God*, *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, *Towards the Goal Supreme*, etc.

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature in Different Languages

Sanskrit

The first part of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* has been translated into Sanskrit and published by the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Belgharia, Calcutta. Swami Harshananda has written a book in Sanskrit — *Karmayoga Sūtrāvali* — based on the teachings of Swami Vivekananda contained in his lectures on Karma-yoga. It is published from Calcutta. Swami Chidghanananda Puri has written a book *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāśya Nirṇaya.*

Apart from this, many scriptures in Sanskrit have been translated into English and other languages by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order or by other scholars in the light of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology, and have been published by the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and other publishers.

Russian

The name of Swami Vivekananda appeared for the first time in the Russian language in the *Church Chronicle*, No. 39, page 623, in 1894, in connection with the Parliament of Religions, Chicago. The story of the entry of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature into the Russian language is fascinating. At the time Swami Vivekananda was preaching in America, Mr. K. J. Popov, a military man of Russia well-known in the world of intellectuals, was travelling around Europe with a grief-stricken heart in search of someone who could help him hear the voice of his wife who had just passed away. At last he reached Italy

where he was told to go to India and meet some Indian yogi, and so he boarded a ship and came to India. When he arrived at Bombay port, he met Swami Vivekananda who had just returned from America. Mr. Popov talked to Swamiji and asked him where his wife was. We do not know what reply Swamiji gave but it is heard that Mr. Popov became calm and no longer craved to see his wife after his meeting with Swamiji. He then went back to Russia and translated many books of Swami Vivekananda — *Rāja-Yoga* in 1914. In 1936 Romain Rolland's books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were translated into Russian, but they were confined to libraries, though copies of the books got circulated clandestinely. All the Yogas of Swami Vivekananda and some other articles were included in a book published in 1993 by Ladamir with the title *Practical Vedanta*. The translations had been done by eminent academicians of Moscow.

The book by Max Müller on Sri Ramakrishna was printed in Russian in Moscow in 1913. The translation was done by I. F. Nazhivin. A translation of some excerpts from the same book was also published in the June 1913 issue of the bimonthly Moscow journal *Bulletin of Literature and Life*. A translation of *The Gospel of Sir Ramakrishna* (in 300 pages) with a preface by Swami Abhedananda was published in 1914. The name of the translator was not mentioned in the book. A small booklet of 46 pages by another anonymous author containing the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna was published in 1915. Many small booklets on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have been published in the Russian language by the Ramakrishna Society Vedanta Centre, Moscow.[29] It has been known that *Mayer Katha* (Bengali), *Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Bengali), and *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (published by Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta) are being translated into Russian, and may see the light of day in near future.

German

From 1937, a quarterly English journal *Vedanta* was brought out from St. Moritz and was translated into German by Mr. Koch and one of his friends. Through the influence of Swami Yatiswarananda, publishers in Switzerland and Germany became interested, and during 1936 and 1937, the four yogas of Swami Vivekananda and *The Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* were published in German with the financial help from Josephine MacLeod. The *Life of Sri Rama-*

krishna and the *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by Romain Rolland were also published.

In 1978, a magazine *Vedanta* was also started in the German language. One of the biggest publishers published the abridged *Gospel* in 1982 under the title *Ramakrishna, His Heritage* in German. In the same year, a German devotee brought out a new biography of Sri Ramakrishna in German in a paperback edition. In recent years Hans Torwesten's *Ramakrishna and Christ* stands out as a scholarly work of great importance. The same author has also brought out a beautiful biography of Ramakrishna in the German language.[30]

Spanish

The first Spanish translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna — El Evangelio de Ramakrishna* – was published in 1912 by the well-known publishing house of Buenos Aires, Editorial Kier. The Buenos Aires centre of the Ramakrisha Math and Mission has so far published 27 titles in Spanish, and 16 other titles in Spanish have been published by outside publishers. The first title published by this centre was *Conferencias de 1934* by Swami Vijayananda in 1935.

Portuguese

On 4 December 2004, in the city of São Paulo, the publishing house Lotus Do Saber released a Portuguese translation of Swami Vivekananda's book *What is Religion.*[31]

Japanese

In January 2005, in connection with the 150th birth-anniversary year of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the Japan Vedanta Society released two of its new publications, *The Life of the Holy Mother* by Swami Nikhilananda, translated into Japanese by Takako D Amours, and *The Gospel of Holy Mother* translated by Mr. Masaki into Japanese.[32]

Greek

Owing to the will of the Divine, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature has been translated even into the ancient and difficult language of Greece. John Manetta, a disciple of Swami Yatiswarananda, who runs a Vedanta centre

in Athens, has translated the *Kathāmrita* (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*), the four yogas of Swami Vivekananda, and the nine Upaniṣads into Greek. He also single-handedly bore the expenditure for these books.

Hindi

It is very difficult to say precisely when the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature started being published in Hindi. Perhaps the earliest article published was on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in the journal *Vihar Bandhu* of May 1894 published from Bankipur, Patna. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in book form were published perhaps for the first time in 1898 from the Indian Press, Allahabad. This book was compiled by Pandit Jwaladutt Joshi, an advocate of the Prayag High Court, who had earlier written the welcome address on behalf of the citizens of Almora on 11 May 1897 when Swami Vivekananda was given a grand reception amidst a crowd of 5000 people of Almora. Pandit Joshi had also come in intimate contact with other brother disciples of Swami Vivekananda. Perhaps he might have had written the book *Drishtānta Samucchaya* three years earlier and approached Swami Abhedananda for its publication, as the latter wrote to him from Jaipur in his letter dated 26-11-1895: 'We do not find a good press here and consequently you are at present obliged to give up the idea of publishing here the *Uktis* in Hindi.... Our Guru Maharaj only knows when these *Uktis* will come out.' After three years the book was published from Allahabad, and Pandit Jwaladutt sent 25 copies of this book to Belur Math. The copies were duly acknowledged by Swami Yogananda.

The second article on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda was published in the bimonthly journal *Nigamagam Chandrika* by Nigamagam Mandali, Mathura (January/February 1899). Pandit Madhavaprasad Joshi, Editor, *Sudarshan*, collected the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and translated them into Hindi and published another book on Sri Ramakrishna in 1903 from Lahari Press, Benares. The popular Hindi writer Sri Mahavirprasad Dvivedi also wrote an article 'Mahatma Ramakrishna Paramahansa' in a monthly journal *Saraswati* (January/February 1903). In 1904, Swami Vijnanananda, a brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda, wrote a book in Hindi on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, which was published by the Brahmavadin Club, Allahabad, in 1904. From 1911 to 1940, about 15 books on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were published by various publishers of Prayag, Benares, Kanpur, Pune, etc.

The Gita Press, Gorakhpur, also brought out a book on Ramakrishna in 1932. Later, the Nagpur centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission started publishing Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature on a large scale. So far 129 titles have been published, the most notable of them being the Hindi translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in three volumes. Already 20,000 sets of this book have been published. The translation has been done by the famous Hindi writer and poet Sri Suryakant Tripathi, known by his pen-name Nirala. Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, has also brought out 41 titles in Hindi, which includes the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in Hindi.

Tamil

To date 333 titles have been published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, in the Tamil language. Of these, 50,000 copies of *Sri Ramakrishna Upadesha Mozhigal*, 15,000 sets of *Sri Ramakrishna Amudha Mozhigan* (set of 3 volumes), and about 7,000 sets of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in Tamil (set of 5 volumes) have been published so far. Among the Order's periodicals, the credit of having the highest circulation goes to the Tamil periodical *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, which was started in 1921. The circulation has increased from 1,100 in 1976 to 92,000 in 2005, which shows its growing popularity.

Malayalam

Books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda began to appear in Malayalam from 1910 onwords. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur, has so far published 208 titles in Malayalam. The first title was *Bhajanavali* in 1956. Since then 15,000 sets of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (set of 7 volumes) and 15,000 sets of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (set of 3 volumes) in Malayalam have so far been published. The *Bhajanavali* (1,90,000 copies) is the popular Malayalam book. A monthly journal in Malayalam named *Prabuddha Keralam* is being published since 1915 (circulation 6000).

Marathi

The Nagpur centre of the Ramakrishna Math has published 174 titles of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in Marathi. Perhaps the first title was *Sri Ramakrishna Charitra* in 1949. So far 15,000 sets of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in Marathi and 20,000 sets of *The Gospel of Sri*

Ramakrishna have been published by the Nagpur centre. The centre is regularly publishing a monthly journal *Jivan Vikas*.

Gujarati

The first biography of Swami Vivekananda was published in the Gujarati daily *Mumbai Samachar* on 8-4-1904 as a lead article. The Sastu Sahitya Vardhak Karyalaya, Ahmedabad, which was started in 1908, published a more elaborate biography of Swami Vivekananda in 1922. This was based on the *Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples* and was written by Ramprasad Kashiprasad Desai. It was a part of the *Vividha Granthamala* series. The same publisher also published a book based on the teachings of Swami Vivekananda in 1920. The name of the translator was Najukalal Nandalal Chokshi of Baroda. In 1921, Kevalram Mavji Dave, an advocate of Rajkot, translated *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* published from the Ramakrishna Math, Madras. The name of the book was *Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Sadvachno*. It was published from Damodar Printing House in Rajkot in 1913. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was also published from the Sastu Sahitya Vardhak Karyalaya, Bombay and Ahmedabad, in 1918. This was a translation from the original Bengali version done by Narmadashankar Balshankar Pandya (Swami Sevananda).

The Gujarati Printing Press, Bombay, published the *Vivekananda Vachanamala* series in 1911. The translation was done by Thakkar Narayan Visanji Chatrabhuj of Porbandar. The first part was published in 1911, the second in 1913, the third in 1914, and the fourth and the fifth parts between 1915 and 1916. An elaborate biography of Sri Ramakrishna in Gujarati was also published in 1918. It was written by Sri Dahyabhai Ramachandra Mehta of Ahmedabad who was the editor of the Gujarati monthly *Bharat Jivan* for many years. He also translated and published an elaborate book on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda in 1920. A book based on the life of Sri Ramakrishna by Prof. Max Müller was published by the Gujarati Vernacular Society before 1918. During the same period the Gujarati Printing Press published another book based on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Abhedananda and Prof. Max Müller.

In 1927, a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission was started in Rajkot, and from then onwards books on Swami Vivekananda in

Gujarati started being published from this centre. The first edition of the translation of *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* was published in 1930. The translation of the original *Kathāmrita* was done by Swami Chaitanyananda and was published in 1965. Thousands of sets of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in Gujarati were published and sold to the panchayat libraries at a nominal price because of the cooperation received from the Government of Gujarat. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* was translated into Gujarati and published during the birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda in 1963. A total of 12 volumes were published in this series, the first being the elaborate life of Sri Ramakrishna, the second, that of Swami Vivekananda, and the rest of the 10 parts contained the translation of the *Complete Works*. The life of Sri Ramakrishna was adjudged the best book of the many books brought out. The *Life of Sadhu Nag Mahashaya* was published in 1917 and thoughts of Mahatma Ramachandra in 1918. The translation of the *Life of Sri Ramakrishan* by Romain Rolland was done by Sri Chandrashankar Shukla and was published by Vora and Publishers, Bombay, in 1955. Swami Ananda took the initiative in this.

Some Important Books in the Ramakrishna-Vivekanada Literature

The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda

Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, has been publishing this set since 1907. It is a collection of the lectures, conversations, letters, articles, and poems of Swami Vivekananda, as well as newspaper reports about him. The first edition was brought out in 1907. It was originally published in 4 volumes, but after more materials started coming in, it was enlarged to 8 volumes. The 9th volume was published in 1997. In the introduction to these volumes, Sister Nivedita has written:

> In the four volumes [presently nine] of the works of the Swami Vivekananda which are to compose the present edition, we have what is not only a gospel to the world at large, but also to its own children, the Charter of the Hindu Faith. What Hinduism needed, amidst the general disintegration of the modern era, was a rock where she could lie at anchor, an authoritative utterance in which she might recognise herself.... For the first time in history,

> ...Hinduism itself forms here the subject of generalisation of a Hindu mind of the highest order. For ages to come the Hindu man who would verify, the Hindu mother who would teach her children what was the faith of their ancestors, will turn to the pages of these books for assurance and light. Long after the English language has disappeared from India, the gift that has here been made, through that language, to the world, will remain and bear its fruit in East and West alike.

Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples

This is the most authoritative biography of Swami Vivekananda and is published by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. The first edition in 4 volumes was published between 1912 and 1918. Many of Swami Vivekananda's Eastern and Western disciples helped in the preparation of this book, but the main writers were Swami Swarupananda, Swami Virajananda, Sister Nivedita, and Mr. F. J. Alexander. The second edition was published in 1933 in two volumes. The fourth edition was brought out in one volume in 1949. Since a lot of new research material on Swami Vivekananda's life was unearthed after this period, a thoroughly revised fifth edition of this book was published in 1978 in two volumes.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Mahendranath Gupta ('M') recorded in his diary the conversations of Sri Ramakrishna with the devotees. It was in October and November 1897 that some important parts of this diary appeared for the first time in print as two pamphlets entitled *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* written by 'M' himself in English. Swami Vivekananda was overjoyed to read these pamphlets and wrote to 'M' in his letter dated 24 November 1897 from Dehra Dun: 'Many thanks for your second leaflet. It is, indeed, wonderful. The move is quite original and never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind as you are doing.... I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them. I am really in a transport when I read them.... Socratic dialogues are Plato all over. You are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful.' It is unfortunate that no copy of these two pamphlets of 1897 is available today. However, we can safely presume that 'M' must have incorporated them in his own English version, which was first published in 1907 in the *Brahmavadin* from Madras. The second revised

edition was published from the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, in 1978. It is now entitled *The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Five volumes of the *Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* in Bengali were brought out one after the other in 1902, 1905, 1907, 1910, and 1932 respectively. Swami Nikhilananda rearranged the contents of these five volumes in chronological order, translated them into English, and published them in 1942 in a single volume under the title *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. It carried a foreword by Aldous Huxley. The Indian edition of the Gospel was published from the Madras centre in 1944.

Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master

Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, wrote a biography of his Master entitled *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, originally in Bengali. This is the most important source book as well as the most authentic book on Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings. The book is unique in biographical literature. It offers, besides an exhaustive chronological account of the life of Sri Ramakrishna, the searching state of his mind, his spiritual experiences, and the philosophical and psychological background against which the events of his inner life can be viewed and understood. It holds a unique place in hagiography. The life story of no other divine personality, worshipped by millions as an incarnation of God, has been written in this way by any of his apostles. The book was originally published in five parts in Bengali, and the first part came out in 1911. This monumental book was translated into English by Swami Jagadananda, and the first edition was published in one volume from the Madras centre in 1952 under the title *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*. The fifth edition of the book was brought out in two volumes. This book has also been translated into many other languages. It is a source book for many biographies of Sri Ramakrishna written by other authors. Recently, in 2003, the Vedanta Society of St. Louis brought out Swami Chetanananda's new translation of the original Bengali version.

The Cultural Heritage of India

This encyclopaedia of Indian culture is now published from the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta, in six volumes. The first edition of this book (in 3 volumes with about 2000 pages) was published

in 1937 by the Sri Ramakrishna Birth Centenary Publication Committee as a birth centenary memorial volume. This work presented for the first time a panorama of the cultural history of India, and it was immediately acclaimed as a remarkable contribution to the cultural literature of the world. Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, one of the greatest exponents of India's cultural heritage, took deep interest in the Institute of Culture from its very inception and wrote the introduction to this book. It is a monument to Indian cooperative research in history, philosophy, religion, fine arts, exact science, economics, politics, literature, and sociology. According to the French savant Romain Rolland, '*Cultural Heritage of India* is a monumental compendium of the treasures of Indian thought of centuries.'

The revised edition has been published subject-wise in six volumes as follows:

1. Vol. I (The Early Phases), with an introduction by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, includes contributions from 30 scholars about early Indian life and culture (pages XIV + 652 + 9 illustrations).
2. Vol. II (Itihāsas, Purāṇas, Dharma, and other Shāstras), with an introduction by Dr. C. C. Ramaswamy Iyer and contributions from 38 scholars, reaffirms Indian ideals and shows how they bind together diverse races into a common platform (pages XXVIII + 738).
3. Vol. III (The Philosophies), with an introduction by Dr. Surendranath Dasgupta and contributions from 35 scholars, presents Indian philosophy in its different aspects (pages XI + 695 + 6 illustrations).
4. Vol. IV (The Religions) contains an introduction by Dr. Bhagwan Das and contributions from 44 scholars (pages XIX + 775 + 3 illustrations).
5. Vol. V (Languages and Literature), with an introduction by Dr. K. M. Munshi and contributions from 50 other scholars, deals with the literary heritage of India from the Vedic times onwards (pages XXV + 839).
6. Vol. VI (Science and Technology), with an introduction by Dr. Raja Ramanna and contributions from 29 other distinguished scientists, presents a connected account of India's achievements in science and technology (pages XX + 550 + 25 illustrations).

Two more volumes of this work are in preparation.

Swami Vivekananda in the West — New Discoveries

From 1950, Marie Louise Burke (Sister Gargi) started her painstaking research on Swami Vivekananda's visit to the West, which later appeared in the form of this monumental series. In its present form it was published for the first time in 1993. It includes the author's two earlier books, *Swami Vivekananda in America — New Discoveries* and *Swami Vivekananda: His Second Visit to the West — Discoveries*, published in 1958 and 1973 respectively from Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. The new series has been published in six volumes under the subtitles 'His Prophetic Mission' (parts I and II), 'The World Teacher' (parts I and II), and A New Gospel (parts I and II). This research work gives many minute details about Swami Vivekananda's work in the United States and other countries and also throws light on some of the unknown dimensions of Swami Vivekananda's personality.

***Vivekananda O Samakālīn Bhāratvarsha* (Bengali)**

Among the innumerable Bengali books of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, special mention must be made of this one. In a way this is the Indian counterpart of Sister Gargi's (Marie Louise Burke's) book mentioned above. Written by Prof. Sankari Prasad Basu, this set of seven volumes presents a vast picture of the contemporary historical scene of India, the various reform movements functioning at that time in India, the political condition in those days, the role of Swami Vivekananda in the Indian renaissance, Swamiji's unique ideas in various branches of knowledge, his contribution to national integration, his dealings with the leading personalities and intellectuals of those days, and lastly, how the next generation of celebrities moulded their lives in accordance with the ideal set by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. This voluminous work received the Sahitya Akademy Award in the year 1978 for the first three volumes. It was published by Mandal Book House, 78/1 Mahatma Gandhi Road, Calcutta-9.

A Concordance to the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, has fulfilled the long-felt need for a concordance by publishing in 1997 the first volume of this

three-volume set. It is not a simple collection of quotaions culled from the vast Vivekananda corpus but an effective guide for scholars and general readers who want to know what Swami Vivekananda said on a particular subject and where that original statement occured. The distinctive feature of this concordance is its emphasis on the ideas rather than the words of Swami Vivekananda.

A Major Publisher

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission now rank as one of the major publishers of books in India. It spent a sum of Rs. 9.36 crores for publication purposes during the year 2003-04. Three of its most important publishing centres are: Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; Ramakrishna Math, Madras; and Udbodhan Office, Calcutta. The annual turnover of books sold by Advaita Ashrama was around 1.9 crores in the year 2004-05. In 2005, it brought out 283 titles, most of them in English. In the same year, the Ramakrishna Math in Madras brought out 292 titles in English, 333 titles in Tamil, and 196 titles in Telugu. Its annual turnover in 2004-05 was about Rs. 2.3 crores for all the books. Its Tamil journal *Ramakrishna Vijayam* has the largest circulation of all the journals of the Ramakrishna Mission, with 92,000 subscribers in 2005. The Udbodhan Office in Calcutta brought out 433 titles in 2005 and its annual turnover of books during 2004-05 was about 2.39 crores. Its Bengali journal *Udbodhan* currently enjoys a circulation of 67,500 with an annual turnover of Rs. 1.55 crores. The sale of books in other regional languages, especially Kannada and Marathi, is also increasing day by day.

However, the status of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission as a major publisher should be judged not merely by the number of titles or the amount of money realized through the sale of books, but by the intellectual, moral, and spiritual quality of the books and the beneficial effect they produce on the minds of people. Through its books the Ramakrishna Movement disseminates some of the highest and noblest ideals and ideas to the modern world. 'A good book is the precious lifeblood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life' — this famous statement of Milton is literally true of the books published by the Ramakrishna Movement. Since its books are published without any commercial motive, they are priced very low. In recent years books have become very expensive, beyond the reach of the

common man. By keeping the price of books low, often by subsidizing them, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission make quality books available to people all over India.

Free Distribution of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature

A new encouraging trend as regard Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature has helped immensely in the propagation of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology. A few publishers have started publishing some selected books at highly subsidized rates so that even an ordinary person can afford to buy them. Also, more and more organizations are making gifts of books and journals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology to their friends. A few centres have started distributing Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature to their friends, and a few have even started distributing books free of charge among students and teachers. During the Chicago Centenary Celebration, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission took the initiative in publishing books of Swami Vivekananda for free distribution among students. Four books of Swami Vivekananda (*Rebuild India*, *My India Arise*, *Chicago Addresses*, and *Short Life of Swami Vivekananda*) in English, Hindi, and Bengali languages, costing about Rs. 34 lakhs, were distributed among students. The above four books were also published in other languages like Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Oriya, Kannada, Gurumukhi, etc. Books in the above languages worth Rs. 16 lakhs were distributed free of charge to students after a talk on the message of Swami Vivekananda was given to them. Thus a great enthusiasm and awakening was generated in the educational institutions by the distribution of such literature. Such attempts, if made on a regular basis, will go a long way in spreading the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature and in uplifting humanity as regards the quality of life.

In this connection, we need to mention two new projects started recently to promote the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature among the masses. They are the *Viveka Murasu Village Awareness Programme* and *Jnana Vahini* started my the Madras and Mysore centres respectively. These projects aim at carrying the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda to the masses of their respective States. They organize bookstalls, exhibitions, and religious meetings with the help of audio-visual aids in the

remote villages and educational institutions. The programme has received an overwhelming response.

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature in Cyberspace

With the advent of modern computers and Internet, the world of literature has now been introduced to a new medium. Today digitization is a global phenomenon. In recent times many of the well-known publishing houses have digitized (or have started digitizing) their important publications. The publishing houses of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have not lagged behind in this. To keep up with the needs of the changing times, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature too started appearing in digitized form. It all began with Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, which brought out their first CD, an e-book called *Swami Vivekananda — Life, Works, and Research*, in 2001. It contained the nine volumes of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, the two volumes of *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, and the six volumes of *Swami Vivekananda in the West — New Discoveries*, a massive literary matter of approximately 10,000 pages. A better version of this e-book was released in 2003. In the same year it brought out another e-book called *Vivekananda for Children*. It comprises illuminating stories for children told by Swami Vivekananda. The stories are colourfully depicted to attract the young minds. The Ramakrishna Ashrama, Madras (T. Nagar), brought out an e-book named *An Integrated E-book on Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* in the year 2003, commemorating the 150th birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. This CD contains the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (translated by Swami Nikhilananda), *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master* (translated by Swami Jagadananda), *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (an exhaustive collection of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings), *Gospel of the Holy Mother* (the English translation of the Bengali book *Sri Sri Maver Katha*), *Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother* (by Swami Tapasyananda), and *The Teachings of Holy Mother*. In 2004 it released *Śāstrāṇi*, a CD containing the important Hindu scriptures. In the same year, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta, brought out a CD under the title *Sri Ma Sarada*, the life of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in Bengali by Swami Gambhirananda. In September 2005, it released the e-version of all the *Udbodhan* articles in 21 CDs. Advaita Ashrama too has taken up the task of digitizing

its esteemed journal *Prabuddha Bharata*, which may take a few years before it sees the light of day.

These are the major digitized works of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature now available to the computer users all over the world. In future we can expect to see even the other important works on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology and Vedanta digitized. Also with the launching of Web sites by our centres all over the world, our literature is being made available to millions of computer users world-wide. With the entry into cyberspace, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature has been ushered into the most modern medium of information dissemination.

Future Prospects

The 21st century is in urgent need of a literature which is capable of instilling higher values of life in people from all walks of life, from the poorest to the richest, without being dogmatic and sectarian in nature, and which will be capable of giving wisdom, strength, and peace of mind to all. We have already entered the new millennium. People of this century are looking for global values, a global religion, and a global civilization. Sir Ramakrishna's message of the harmony of religions, Swami Vivekananda's electrifying message of hope and strength, and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's message of universal love have the potential to usher us into a new civilization in this 21st century. Thus we can look forward to the opening of a glorious chapter for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in the near future. What is needed now is to present it in a style and mode suited to the needs of modern man, and to make earnest and systematic attempts to spread this literature on a vast scale with the help of latest techniques and communication methods. The appearance of our literature in cyberspace is a definite step in this direction. We can hope that through Internet a large section of people all over the world, especially the young, will be introduced to our literature. This also means we need to keep pace with the fast changing technology and upgrade ourselves from time to time.

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ANNEXE – I

A Survey of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Literature (RVL)

Summary of RVL published by the major publication centres of Ramakrishna Math and Mission as in the year 2005 (figures followed by * mark indicate 1999 status)

Sl. No.	Name of the Publication Centre	No. of Titles	Language	Remarks
1.	Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras	838	English-292, Tamil-333 Telugu-196, Sanskrit-17	First title published: *Inspired Talks* in 1908 Popular Books: 1. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Eng) I - 57,400 copies. 2. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Eng) II - 41,800 copies. 3. *Sri Ramakrishna Upadesh Mozighal* (Tamil) - 50,400 copies. 4. *Sw. Vivekananda Jeevita Charit* (Telugu) - 75,100 copies. 5. *C.W. of Sw. Vivekananda* (Tamil) 16 Vols - 6,200 Sets. 6. *C.W. of Sw. Vivekananda* (Telugu) 10 Vols - 8,800 Sets. 7. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Telugu) 5 Vols - 11,000 Sets.
2.	Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta	283	English-182, Hindi-53 Nepali-2, English-Sanskrit-46	Early Books - *The Atman* in 1905, *C.W. of Sw. Vivekananda* (Eng) Vol 1 to 4 in 1907. Popular Books: 1. *C.W. of Sw. Vivekananda* (Eng) 1,54,000 Sets (including Subs.ed). 2. *Selections from C.W. of Sw Vivekananda* (Eng). 3. *Sw Vivekananda — His call to the Nation.* 4. *Mind and Its Control.* 5. *Will Power & Its Development.* 6. *Thoughts of power.*

Sl. No.	Name of the Publication Centre	No. of Titles	Language	Remarks
3.	Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta	132	English-98, Bengali-31 Hindi-2, Oriya-1	First title published — *Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance* in 1940. Popular Books: 1. *Shatarupe Sarada* (Bengali) - 56,000 copies. 2. *Amar Bharat Amar Bharat* (Bengali) - 30,000 copies. Important Books: 1. *Cultural Heritage of India* (6 Vols). 2. *Chintanayak Vivekananda* (Bengali).
4.	Ramakrishna Math, Udbodhan, Calcutta	433	English-14, Bengali-416, Hindi-3	First title published: *Ramakrishna* (Bengali) in 1899. Popular Books: 1. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Bengali) - 40,000 sets (2 Vols) 2. *C.W. of Sw. Vivekananda* (Bengali).
5.	Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur	335	Marathi-174, Hindi-161	First title published: *Sri Ramakrishna Charitra* (Marathi) in 1949. Popular Books: 1. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Hindi) - 20,000 sets (3 Vols). 2. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Marathi) - 20,000 sets. 3. *C.W. of Sw Vivekananda* (Marathi) - 15,000 sets.
6.	Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur	225*	English-17, Malayalam-208	First title published: *Bhajanavali* (Malayalam) in 1956. Popular Books: 1. *Bhajanavali* (Malayalam) - 1,30,000 copies. 2. *Gita* (Malayalam) - 1,73,000 copies. 3. *Sw. Vivekananda Suktagal* (Malayalam) - 1,90,000 copies. 4. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Malayalam) - 15,000 sets (3 Vols). 5. *C.W. of Sw. Vivekananda* (Malayalam) - 15,000 sets (7 Vols).

Sl. No.	Name of the Publication Centre	No. of Titles	Language	Remarks
7.	Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore	265	Kannada-265	First title published: *Viveka Vani* (Kannada) in 1933. Popular Books: 1. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Kannada) - 22,000 copies. 2. *C.W. of Sw. Vivekananda* (Kannada) - 2,800 sets (10 Vols). 3. *Biographies of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Sw. Vivekananda* in all sizes (Kannada) - 3,13,000 copies.
8.	Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore	82	English-54, Sanskrit-5, Kannada-23	First title published: *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Kannada) in 1925. Popular Books: 1. *Secret of Concentration* (English) - 70,000 copies. 2. *Hindu Dharma Prashnotara Rupadalli* (Kannada) - 58,000 copies. 3. *Badukala Kaliyiri* (Kannada) - 49,000 copies.
9.	Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot	171	Gujarati-161, English-10	First title published: *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasnga* (Gujarati) in 1930. Popular Books: 1. *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Gujarati) - 20,000 sets (3 Vols). 2. *C.W. of Sw. Vivekananda* (Gujarati) - 21,000 sets (12 Vols). 3. *Biography of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Sw. Vivekananda* (in all sizes in Gujarati) - 2,50,000 copies. 4. *Shaktidayivichar* (Gujarati) - 1,34,000 copies. 5. *Yuvanone* (Gujarati) - 1,15,000 copies.
10.	Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore	21	English-2, Tamil-19	First title published: *Kalivi Sw. Vivekananda* (Tamil) in 1940. Popular Books: 1. *Kalivi Sw. Vivekananda* (Tamil) - 24,000 copies. 2. *Bhajana Padalgal* (Tamil) - 30,000 copies. 3. *Educational Philosophy of Sw. Vivekananda* (English) 11,000 copies.

Sl. No.	Name of the Publication Centre	No. of Titles	Language	Remarks
11.	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur (W.B.)	82	English-7 Bengali-140	First title published: *Ma Sarada Devi* (Bengali). Popular Books: 1. *Murgi Palan* (Bengali)
12.	Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi	23*	English-12, Hindi-5, Punjabi-2, Urdu-4	First title published: *Make India Great.* Popular Books: 1. *How to Build Character* 2. *Sri Sarada Devi-The Great Wonder.*
13.	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ulubari, Guwahati	9	Assamese-9	Popular Books: *Sri Ramakrishna in Pictures* (Assamese) -10,000 copies.
14.	Ramakrishna Mission, Vivekananda Ashrama, Raipur (M.P.)	7*	Hindi-7	
15.	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi	29	Bengali-2, Hindi-23, Nagpuri-3, English-1	Popular Books: *Agnimantra* (Hindi) - 2,00,000 copies.
16.	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunji	21*	Khasi-20	
17.	Ramakrishna Math Bhuvaneswar (Orissa)	96	Oriya-96	
18.	Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur (Howrah)	8	Bengali-11	Many audio cassettes and CDs have also been produced.

Sl. No.	Name of the Publication Centre	No. of Titles	Language	Remarks
19.	Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia, Calcutta	13	Bengali-10, English-3,	*Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* Part-1 was being published in Sanskrit, which was recently discontinued.
20.	Vedanta Society of New York, USA	45	English-45	Early Books: *Vedanta Philosophy* by Sw. Vivekananda. *The Real and Apparent Man* by Sw. Vivekananda, and *Spiritual Unfoldment* by Sw. Vivekananda published in 1901. Baker & Taylor Co. started publishing many books of Sw. Vivekananda before Vedanta Society started doing so.
21.	Vedanta Society of Northern California, USA	17*	English-17	Early Books: *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in 1912. Books edited by this centre but published from Advaita Ashrama have not been included, eg. *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries* (6 Vols.) by Marie Louise Burke.
22.	Vedanta Society of St. Louis, USA.	13*	English-13	Books edited by this centre but published from Advaita Ashrama have not been included. Early Books: *Ethos and Religion* in 1942. Popular Books: 1. *Vedanta-Voice of Freedom* by Sw. Chetananda - 4,000 copies.
23.	Vedanta Society of Southern California, USA	12	English-12	Over 10 Lakh copies sold of *Bhagavad Gita* in all editions.
24.	Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, UK.	7*	English-7	*Women Saints of East & West* published in 1955.

Sl. No.	Name of the Publication Centre	No. of Titles	Language	Remarks
25.	Ramakrishna Ashrama, Argentina	26	Spanish-26	Early Books: *Conferencias de 1934* by Swami Vijayananda in 1935. Popular Books: *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Spanish) - 2,000 sets (3 Vols).
26.	Nippon Vedanta Kyokai, Japan	26	Japanese-19	Early Books: *Selected Verses of Sw. Vivekananda* (Japanese) in 1962. Popular Books: *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Japanese) 3,000 copies.
27.	Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna, Gretz France.	15	French-15	
28.	Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Dhaka, Bangladesh	20*	English-16, Bengali-4	First title published: *The Philosophy of Vivekananda and Future of Man* by Late Brg. G. C. Dev in 1963
29.	Ramakrishna Mission Kila Maidan, Indore – 452006.	9*	English-1, Hindi-8	All small booklets on Education.

ANNEXE – II

Books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology published from outside the Ramakrishna Order as in the year 1999

Sl. No.	Name of the Publication Centre	No. of Titles	Language	Remarks
1.	Sri Sarada Math Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700076.	33	English-13, Bengali-18 Hindi-2	First title published: *Bhagini Nivedita* by Pravrajika Muktiprana. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (in 4 Vols) was earlier published from there; now it is published by Advaita Ashrama.
2.	Akhil Bharatiya Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal, 'Bhuban-Bhavan', P.O.Balaram, Dharma Sopan Khardeh, North 24 Panzanas, West Bengal –743121.	74	English-25, Hindi-11 Bengali-29, Sanskrit-1, Oriya-4, Telugu-2, Assamese-1, Marathi-1	Popular Books: *Janaganer Adhikar* (Bengali) — more than 1 lakh copies sold.
3.	Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan Trust, 3 Singarachari Street, Triplicane, Madras-600005	8	English-6, Tamil-1, Hindi-1	Important Books: *Comprehensive Biography of Sw. Vivekananda* by Prof. S.N.Dhar (in 2 Vols.)
4.	Sri Ma Trust 579, 18-B Chandigarh-160018	7	English-4, Bengali-1 Hindi-2	*Sri Ma Darshan* (English) in 16 Vols (8-16 Vols under print); Hindi & Bengali each in 16 Vols.
5.	Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Munshi Sadan, Kulpati K.M. Munshi Marg, Mumbai – 400007	8	English-8	

ANNEXE – III

Periodicals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology published by the centres of Ramakrishna Math and Mission as in the year 2005 (figures followed by * mark indicate 1999 status)

Sl. No.	Name of the Periodical	Language	Periodicity	Year of Starting	Circulation (No. of copies)	Publication Centre	Remarks
1.	Prabuddha Bharata	English	Monthly	1896	6255	Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati	Started by Alasinga Perumal and Dr. Nanjunda Rao under the inspiration of Sw. Vivekananda. The first editor was B. Rajam Iyer. From August 1898 to March 1899 it was published from Almora, and from April 1899 onwards it is regularly being published from Mayavati.
2.	The Vedanta Kesari	English	Monthly	1914	8600	Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras	
3.	Bulletin of Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture	English	Monthly	1950	4000	Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta	
4.	Vedanta	English	Bimonthly	1951	600*	Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, UK	
5.	Global Vedanta	English	Bimonthly	1996		Vedanta Society Seattle, USA	

Sl. No.	Name of the Periodical	Language	Periodicity	Year of Starting	Circulation (No. of copies)	Publication Centre	Remarks
6.	Vedanta	French	Quarterly	1965	800	Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna, Gretz, France	
7.	Fumetsu No kotoba (Universal Gospel)	Japanese	Bimonthly	1961	333	Nippon Vedanta Kyokai Kanajauva, Japan	Started as a monthly in 1961 by RK Vedanta Society, Tokyo. From 1970 it is being published as a bimonthly.
8.	Udbodhan	Bengali	Monthly	1899	67500	Ramakrishna Math Udbodhan, Calcutta	Inspired by Sw. Vivekananda, Sw Trigunatitananda started this journal.
9.	Samaj Siksha	Bengali	Monthly	1955	943	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, (West Bengal)	
10.	Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam	Tamil	Monthly	1921	92000	Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras	Thousands of copies sold through 650 agents through 3500 outlets. Well-wishers of this periodical have donated life membership fees for supply of this periodical free of charge to 1450 libraries and 6500 educational institutions.
11.	Ashrama Vani	Hindi	Monthly	1982	2000*	Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Marg) Kila Maidan, Indore-452006 (M.P)	

Sl. No.	Name of the Periodical	Language	Periodicity	Year of Starting	Circulation (No. of copies)	Publication Centre	Remarks
12.	Sri Ramakrishna Prabha	Telugu	Monthly	1944	21500	Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras	
13.	Prabuddha Keralam	Malayalam	Monthly	1915	6000*	Sri Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur	Started in 1915 at Kollam, later shifted to Quilandy, Ottapalam, Allappuzha, Kalady, and then to Thrissur in 1964.
14.	Jivan Vikas	Marathi	Monthly	1957	12000	Sri Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur	
15.	Sri Ramakrishna Jyot	Gujarati	Monthly	1989	5500	Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot	Patrons 823.
16.	Viveka Jyoti	Hindi	Quarterly	1963	12750	Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Ashrama, Raipur (M.P.).	Life Members 9900.
17.	Divyayan Samachar	Hindi	Monthly	1979	1700	Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi	
18.	Journal of Educational Research & Extension	English	Quarterly	1963	200	Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore	
19.	Viveka Prabha	Kannada	Monthly	2000	17961	Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore	
20.	Nirvana	English	Quaterly	1994		Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore	

ANNEXE – IV

Periodicals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology now discontinued

Sl. No.	Name of the Periodical	Language	Periodicity	Year of Starting	Year of Closure	Publication Centre	Remarks
1.	Brahmavadin	English	Monthly	1895	1914	Alasinga Perumal, Brahmavadin Office, Madras.	
2.	Voice of Truth	English		1926	1927		
3.	The Message of the East	English	Monthly	1912	1936	Vedanta Centre, 32, Fabbay, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.	
		English	Quarterly	1937	1952	Vedanta Centre, 420, Becan Street, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.	
		English	Quarterly	1953	1955	Ananda Ashrama, Kohaset, Massachusetts, USA.	
4.	Pacific Vedantin	English		1902		Vedanta Society of San Francisco, USA	
5.	The Voice of Freedom	English	Monthly	1909	1916	Vedanta Society of Northern California USA	Started by Swami Trigunatitananda. The periodical discontinued one year after his passing away.

Sl. No.	Name of the Periodical	Language	Periodicity	Year of Starting	Year of Closure	Publication Centre	Remarks
6.	Voice of India	English	Bimonthly	1938	1940	Vedanta Society of Northern California, USA	The periodical was started jointly by Swami Ashokananda (of Vedanta Society of San Francisco, later known officially as Vedanta Society of Northern California) and Swami Prabhavananda (of Vedanta Society of Los Angeles, later known officially as Vedanta Society of Southern California) in January 1938. It continued until January 1940. Then the title was changed to *Vedanta and the West* from the January-February 1941 issue. It continued to be published from Vedanta Society of Southern California until November-December 1970. Swami Ashokananda published *Voice of India* again from the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, in 1945-46 as a bimonthly.
7.	Vedanta & the West	English	Bimonthly	1941	1970	Vedanta Society of Southern California, USA	
8.	Morning Star	English English	Weekly Monthly	1928 1930	1929 1932	Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Patna (Bihar)	

Sl. No.	Name of the Periodical	Language	Periodicity	Year of Starting	Year of Closure	Publication Centre	Remarks
9.	Vedanta Darpan (The Mirror of Vedanta)	English	Monthly	1931		Vedanta Society of New York, USA	
10.	Samanvaya	Hindi	Monthly	1921	1928	Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati	
11.	Ramakrishna Niketan	Marathi	Monthly	1924	1940	Sri Parasuram Sadashiv Desai, Malwa	

ANNEXE – V

Periodicals on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology being published from outside the Ramakrishna Order

Sl. No.	Name of the Periodical	Language	Periodicity	Year of Starting	Publication Centre	Remarks
1.	Yuva Bharati	English	Monthly	1963	Vivekananda Kendra 3, Singarachari street, Triplicane Madras-600005	
2.	Samvit	English	Half-yearly	1980	Sri Sarada Math Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700076	Circulation: approx 1500 copies (in 1999)
3.	Vedanta	German	Quarterly	1978	Vedanta Gentreon Wisdom (Germany)	
4.	Vedanta Universal	Spanish	Bimonthly	1993	Noemi Ricciotto Bhaia Blanka city, Argentina	A lady devotee, Noemi Riccsiotto of Bhaia Blanca, Argentina, published the periodical; circulation approximately 100 copies (in 1999)
5.	Vivek Shikha	Hindi	Monthly	1982	Dr. Kedarnath Labh, Ramakrishna Nilagam, Jaiprakash Nagar, Chapra-841301 (Bihar)	Circulation: approx. 1000 copies (in 1999)
6.	Nibodhata	Bengali	Quarterly	1987	Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta-700076	Circulation : approx. 5000 copies (in 1999)

Sl. No.	Name of the Periodical	Language	Periodicity	Year of Starting	Publication Centre	Remarks
7.	Vishwavani	Bengali	Monthly	1926	Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 19B Raja Ramakrishna Street, Calcutta-700006.	Started by Swami Abhedananda
8.	Viveka Jivan	a. Bengali b. English	Monthly	1968	Akhil Bharatiya Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal, 'Bhuban-Bhavan' P.O. Balaram Dharma Sopan Khardeh, 24 Parganas (WB)	Circulation: apporx. 1300 copies (in 1999)

Journals of the Ramakrishna Order
THE EARLY YEARS

SANKARI PRASAD BASU

IT WOULD SEEM a little surprising that Swami Vivekananda, the spiritual leader of modern India and of the world, was at the same time a 'journalist'. The attributes we normally associate with journalism would seem to be incompatible with spirituality. A spiritual person worships Truth and God, whereas a journalist worships news, which is very often made for serving some mundane purpose. Needless to say, if Vivekananda could be called a journalist, he must be one of Truth itself, which in fact was his very life. The journals he founded and conducted on a social level had perhaps for the first time in history the rare privilege of being directly served by a man of God, a prophet. This happened in accordance with the need of the times: the modern era could not do without journalism, and it therefore needed the inspiration of a prophet-journalist. Swami Vivekananda fulfilled this need of our journalistic age.

Whatever might be the reason, the fact remains that Vivekananda was the founder of three periodicals in India, which, even during his own lifetime, acquired distinction within the short span of a few years.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly when Swamiji first conceived the idea of publishing journals. But we can assume that from the time he resolved to disseminate Sri Ramakrishna's life and message, he must have thought of establishing periodicals for the purpose. During his childhood, religious and reform movements were rising all over India, and he saw with his own eyes what an impetus journals and dailies gave to those movements. Again, he also

saw the hollowness that sometimes lurked beneath that kind of journalism. The journals were often full of empty verbosity and harmful foreign ideas. 'Truth' and 'strength' — which, to Swamiji, were the two watchwords for the regeneration of humanity — often found no place on their pages.

It is to be noted that Vivekananda, even in his early years, urged Upendranath Mukherjee, a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, to start a periodical. It is said that Sri Ramakrishna once told someone, 'Naren will lecture and Upen will run a printing press.' As Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) was disturbed by the sustained efforts of some so-called progressive papers to belittle the age-old Indian culture, he asked Upendranath to do something. Thus, in 1889, Upendranath began publishing a journal named *Sāhitya-Kalpadruma*, which, within just a few months of its inception, began to be edited by the well-known littérateur-journalist Sureshchandra Samajpati. The name of the journal was subsequently changed to *Sāhitya.* It acquired a significant place in the cultural life of Bengal. In *Sāhitya-Kalpadruma* Vivekananda's Bengali translation of a part of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis was published in five consecutive numbers beginning from the very first issue. Later, on the eve of Vivekananda's return to India, Upendranath began the publication of a weekly, the *Basumati.* The journal accepted as its inspiration the motto *Namo Nārāyanāya* (Salutations to the Supreme Being in human beings) given by Swamiji.

Undoubtedly Upendranath was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a friend of Vivekananda, and the contribution of the *Basumati* to the dissemination of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideas had been large; yet a journal like this, published primarily with a business motive, could never have been an ideal mouthpiece for Vivekananda. And again, a journal which was to be a vehicle of Swamiji's universal and Vedantic ideas could hardly achieve its end if published in Bengali.

In America, after his phenomenal success at the Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda received overwhelming acceptance from various journals and newspapers. However, he also saw how there were attempts to distort his views and discredit his character. He realized that newspapers that had lent their support to him would only continue to do so as long as they found his mission agreeable to their own purpose. And if one wanted to retain the support of the papers, one would have to compromise the independence of one's views. Such

a thing would have been inconceivable for someone like Swamiji. As far as India was concerned, Swamiji understood that the display of enthusiasm there would die down if it was not properly channelled through an organization and a mouthpiece of its own.

II

It was when he was in America that Vivekananda first took an active interest in publishing a journal, and the first person that came to his mind to take charge of it was Alasinga Perumal. A blessed soul indeed! Alasinga occupies an important place in the annals of the Ramakrishna Movement.[1] He was the pioneer in the efforts to send Vivekananda to the West. Like his Master, Vivekananda, Alasinga felt the need of a journal and wrote to Swamiji about it. In spite of accepting the soundness of Alasinga's idea, Swamiji put more emphasis *in the beginning* on the value of selfless service. In an inspiring letter dated 28 May 1894, he wrote to Alasinga:

> Printing magazines, papers, etc. are good, no doubt, but actual work, my boys, even if infinitesimal, is better than eternal scribbling and talking.[2]

But within a short time Swamiji gave his approval to Alasinga's proposal. In the letter of 11 July 1894 he wrote to Alasinga:

> Start the journal and I will send you articles from time to time.... I shall try to send you money from time to time to publish paper etc.... What about Madras magazine?... Make Kidi write on.

From this letter it is not difficult to see that discussions regarding the publication of a journal had been going on for a considerable period before this date. Yet it was more than a year before the journal was actually first published. In the meantime, Swamiji was giving much inspiration and many a reminder in a number of letters.[3] It was with his approval that the journal was named the *Brahmavadin* and took for its motto: *Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti* — 'Truth is one; sages call it by various names.'

Swamiji's help, support, and inspiration, as well as Alasinga's back-breaking labours, made the *Brahmavadin* a success so long as Alasinga was alive. But within a few years of Alasinga's death, its publication ceased.

Financially, the journal was never a success. It was sustained more by its life-giving ideas. A small portion of the history of its tremendous struggles can be found in hints given in Vivekananda's letters. Today, after more than a hundred years, we do not need to unearth this history. But one thing we must not fail to recognize is that despite all the behind-the-scene struggles, the *Brahmavadin* always showed an illumined face. It played an important role in highlighting the history of Ramakrishna Mission's earliest philanthropic activities and has thus contributed to the furtherance of the ideals of the Ramakrishna Movement during its infancy. This has been briefly discussed in the next article. The journal was appreciated in many quarters of the contemporary cultural circle of India, and in connection with it, two names — Vivekananda and Alasinga — were mentioned time and again.[4]

III

When the *Brahmavadin* was only ten months old, another English monthly, *Prabuddha Bharata or Awakened India*, appeared from Madras, conducted by Swamiji's devotees. It may seem that the rise of this second journal was due to some idealistic schism among Vivekananda's followers, but that is not so. It was again with Swamiji's blessings that its publication started, and Alasinga, the editor of the *Brahmavadin*, was among its organizers. Mr. M. G. Srinivasan, in his article in the *Prabuddha Bharata* of August 1947, has claimed that Alasinga played the main role in organizing this journal:

> The *Prabuddha Bharata* also owes its origin to Alasinga. It was he who first proposed that as the *Brahmavadin* was of more advanced standard, generally suitable to Vedantic scholars and elderly persons, another journal in English should be started for the benefit of youths and less educated persons, containing simpler and less scholarly contributions. It was Alasinga who selected B. R. Rajam Iyer as the first editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, which was started in the year 1896 through the joint efforts of Alasinga, Dr. Nanjunda Rao, and G. G. Narasimhachar.

Mr. Srinivasan's statement is more or less true. But on one point some questions can be raised. Who was the main architect of the newly-established journal? That Swamiji, in some of his letters to Alasinga, commented on the

scholarly articles of the *Brahmavadin* and expressed his apprehension that they were not suitable for bringing the message of Vedanta to the general public, can be seen from his collected letters. But at the same time he was against reducing the standard of the *Brahmavadin*. Naturally then the question arose of a second journal that would serve Swamiji's purpose. In response to Swamiji's wishes, Alasinga might have discussed the matter with his friends. But from Swamiji's letters it appears that the said proposal of a second journal came from Dr. Nanjunda Rao's letters. In a letter from New York, dated 14 April 1896, Swamiji wrote to Dr. Rao:

> I have every sympathy with your proposed magazine for boys, and will do my best to help it on. You ought to make it independent, following the same lines as the *Brahmavadin*, only making the style and matter much more popular.... Avoid all attempts to make the journal scholarly.... Don't make it metaphysical at all.... As to the business part, keep it wholly in your hands, 'too many cooks spoil the broth'.

It is evident that Swamiji put the entire responsibility of this paper on Dr. Nanjunda Rao, just as Alasinga was given the responsibility of the *Brahmavadin*. We can also see that Swamiji determined the basic character which distinguished it from the *Brahmavadin*. In the same letter he also wrote of 'those wonderful stories scattered all over the Sanskrit literature, to be re-written and made popular', which should be one of the functions of the journal. He assured the organizers in more than one letter that he would personally help in the matter; but, being overwhelmed with different activities, he was not able to do so.[5]

In the last part of Swamiji's letter of 14 April 1896, he made it clear that the 'help' he promised for the journal was not to be financial. Swamiji was then not in a position to extend financial assistance to the *Prabuddha Bharata*, as he was doing for the *Brahmavadin*. But Swamiji had faith that Dr. Nanjunda Rao, a famous physician of Madras, would be able to sustain the journal both financially and organizationally. Dr. Rao had a philosophical bent of mind. His book *Cosmic Consciousness of the Vedantic Idea of Mukti*, published in 1909, was highly appreciated in educated circles throughout India.

Singaravelu Mudaliar — Swamiji's dear 'Kidi' — became the manager of the *Prabuddha Bharata* or *Awakened India*. He was an extraordinary person. After a brilliant academic career, he became professor of physics at the Madras

Christian College. Transformed by a 'touch' of Swamiji, the householder Kidi renounced everything. The only active work he took up after that was his dedicated service to *Prabuddha Bharata*. When he died prematurely in 1901, the *Brahmavadin* confirmed that it was Swamiji's influence which was at the root of his deeply spiritual life.

The first editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, B. R. Rajam Iyer, was a graduate and a talented young man of twenty-four. During his college days he was greatly attracted to English novels and poetry of the Romantic era. He was especially drawn to the poetry of Wordsworth and Shelley. The profound yearning for truth in their poetry drew Rajam to the Tamil poet Thayumanavar. Another celebrated Tamil poet, Kamban, was in his eyes one of the greatest poetic geniuses of the world. Rajam himself began to write a novel, *Kamalambal*, which was published serially in the journal *Viveka-Chintāmani*. Naturally, such a talented young man must have come to the attention of many people, including Alasinga and other devotees of Vivekananda. It is said that Rajam Iyer had also come in contact with Swamiji and had imbibed Vedantic ideas. In his book *Rambles in Vedanta*, Rajam drew biographical portraits in which Vedantic truths are exemplified. It was after the publication of one of his essays in the *Brahmavadin* that Alasinga and others sought him out and requested him to edit *Prabuddha Bharata*.[6]

The prospectus of *Prabuddha Bharata* was published in various papers and journals of India. Surprisingly, however, this prospectus did not carry the name of Dr. Nanjunda Rao, the main organizer of the journal. The signatories of this prospectus were: P. Aiyaswami, M.A., B.L.; B. R. Rajam Iyer, B.A.; G. G. Narasimhachar, B.A.; and B. V. Kameswara, B.A. From this it would appear that the two journals were conducted in close collaboration.

The prospectus of *Prabuddha Bharata* was written following Swamiji's direction. At the beginning there was a statement regarding the world-wide interest in Vedanta: 'The word Vedanta is nearly as familiar on the shores of Lake Michigan as on the banks of the Ganges.' The prospectus went on to say that despite such increased interest in Vedantic ideas, materialism was spreading due to the influence of Western education, and to overcome this materialism *Awakened India* was being published. But what was the need for another journal when the *Brahmavadin* was fulfilling the same purpose? The prospectus answers:

> It will be a sort of supplement to the *Brahmavadin* and seek to do for students, young men and others, what that is already doing so successfully for the more advanced classes. It will with that view endeavour to present the sacred truths of Hindu Religion and the sublime and beautiful ideal of the Vedanta in as simple, homely and interesting a manner as possible, and amongst others, will contain 'Puranic' and 'Classical Episodes' illustrative of those great truths and that high ideal, Philosophical Tales and Novels of the modern type, short articles on philosophical subjects written in a simple, popular style free from technicalities, and the lives and teachings of great Sages and Bhaktas irrespective of caste, creed or nationality, who are and ever will be the beacon lights of humanity.

The publication of this prospectus followed by the journal itself was heartily welcomed in many quarters. And the show of appreciation was not just formality, but was rather a warm reception for the new movement ushered in by Swami Vivekananda — which to many was nothing but the Indian renaissance. In the *Prabuddha Bharata's* first editorial, 'Ourselves', the aim and future plan of work of the journal were discussed in more detail than what was given in the prospectus; and it quoted a considerable portion of the letter Swamiji had written to Dr. Nanjunda Rao. It also attempted to bring out the basic outlook of the Vedanta Movement of Vivekananda. The first paragraph of this long editorial is worth quoting here with a view to defining precisely the contemporary Indian social and religious background in which the journal came into existence:

> The ready response with which our prospectus has been favoured on all sides, the eagerness with which our movement has been welcomed, and the support that has been generously promised to us in several quarters, all show that the time is ripe for similar undertakings, that there is a real demand in the country for spiritual nourishment — for the refinement of the soul. But a few years ago, the *Prabuddha Bharata* or the *Brahmavadin* would have been utterly impossible. The promise of many a western 'ism' had to be tried, and the problem of life itself had been forgotten for a while in the noise and novelty of the steam engine and the electric tram; but unfortunately steam-engines and electric trams do not clear up the mystery; they only thicken it. This was found out, and a cry, like that of the hungry lion,

> arose for religion and things of the soul. Science eagerly offered its latest discoveries, but all its evolution theories and heredity doctrines did not go deep enough. Agnosticism offered its philosophy of indifference, but no amount of that kind of opium-eating could cure the fever of the heart. The Christian Missionary offered his creed, but as a creed it would not suit; India has grown too big for that coat.

Swamiji, the founder of the journal, had sent his blessings, but he sent at the same time a criticism of its cover-design. Earlier he had also criticized the cover of the *Brahmavadin*, but this time the criticism was more scathing and detailed. On the cover of the very first issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* was printed a garish picture incorporating a number of ideas. The organizers had high hopes centred on it and were naturally sensitive about it; and educated people who would praise such a design for a Vedanta journal were not wanting.[7]

The success which the *Prabuddha Bharata* achieved within one year was beyond all expectations. In the 'Retrospect' published at the end of the year, the young editor wrote not a little exuberantly, which is excusable when it is remembered that he was only twenty-five. The editor admitted that it was Swamiji's blessings which were at the root of their success. He also mentioned the 'sincerity of purpose and purity of heart' of his co-workers, and the rest of the 'Retrospect' contained many more emotional effusions about the selfless enterprise of the organizers. They may seem today to be overstatements; nevertheless, it is such self-confidence and love for the ideal which lay beneath their work that could move the world. A portion of the 'Retrospect' is given here:

> The present number concludes the first volume of the *Prabuddha Bharata* and it is now time enough to ask what we have learnt from it. Thus questioning ourselves, we find we have learnt many things. Indeed, even its short history is remarkably full of lessons and one of the most important which we, i.e. those who are connected with it, have learnt and which we shall do well to carry with us to the very end of our lives is this — sincerity of purpose and purity of heart work wonders even in this 'iron age'. We had no grand ambitions when we started the journal such as bettering the world and so on. All that we wanted was to improve ourselves, and we had a conviction that what is good for us may at the same time be useful to some others. Nor had we any motives as fame, position, money, etc. The idea of starting the

journal struck us providentially, as it were, and whatever may be its fate in the future, we should be eternally grateful to God for having allowed us to enter into the work with singularly pure hearts. We were at this time perfectly free from both rājasic self-confidence and tāmasic ambition. In such a happy state, which we shall ever remember with pleasure, we sought and obtained permission from where such permission should be obtained and 'commenced operations'. What success has attended us is due entirely to the blessings we received and the purity of our hearts. And that success has been of no small measure.

Finally the 'Retrospect' presented its plans for the future:

> No pain will be spared to make the journal more interesting, instructive and readable than it is at present, and arrangements are being made to secure the assistance of well-known writers on Vedanta and, God willing, the journal will be improved in every way. All that we can say is, that we shall work with zeal and sincerity, no matter what the result might be. 'To work alone we have the right but not to the fruit thereof.'

However, just two years after this splendid start, when the journal was at the zenith of its fame, there appeared in it, in June 1898, an editorial entitled 'Farewell' — a most unexpected end of a journal of which much was expected. It was indeed a 'darkness at noon'.

The journal would cease publication with that issue. Why? Was it due to financial difficulties? No. It was clearly stated in the 'Farewell' editorial that 'the journal was a thorough success as a business concern', and along with that it announced that it was the most widely circulated monthly journal of India in those days. The sole reason for this abrupt end was the unexpected death of the young editor, who was, in fact, its 'life and soul'. The 'Farewell' began with the following lines:

> We regret very much to intimate to our subscribers that we are forced to stop the journal with this issue, as we find the loss sustained in the premature death of our Editor, Mr. B. R. Rajam Iyer, irreparable. Except the few 'Contributions' and the 'Extracts', all the articles were written by him, some under the following pseudonyms: T. C. Nataraja, M. Ranganatha Shastri, A Recluse, and Nobody-knows-who.

IV

The journal died but only to resurrect again. On 28 June 1898, a letter from Swami Sadananda, written from Almora, appeared in the Lahore *Tribune*. Among other things it said:

> May I request the favour of your kindly allowing me, through the medium of your widely read paper, to announce the fact that *Prabuddha Bharata or The Awakened India* will not be discontinued as stated in its last issue, but will henceforth be published in an improved form from the Ramakrishna Math, Almora, Kumaon, N.W.P., under a new management of which the head is the illustrious Swami Vivekananda, who will be one of the regular contributors to its paper. The first issue is expected to appear on or about the 1st August next.

And the *Prabuddha Bharata* did appear on the stipulated date.

For more than one reason the Ramakrishna Mission felt it necessary to resume the publication of the journal. First, the sudden closure of this very popular magazine was a matter of pain, especially for Swamiji, many of whose future plans were centred round this Vedanta journal. Second, the discontinuance of its publication seemed to indicate some sort of defeat for the new Vedanta Movement, the acceptance of which in the first phase of its work would have been ominous. Besides, the Ramakrishna Mission needed a mouthpiece of its own. Both the *Brahmavadin* and the *Prabuddha Bharata* originated from the direct inspiration and support of Vivekananda and were conducted by his followers, but they were not journals of the Ramakrishna Mission. Their proprietorship belonged to others (Swamiji refused to take over the ownership of them). As regards policies, both of them had been to a large extent following Vivekananda's ideas, but there was nothing binding them to continue doing so. As long as Swamiji had not founded any organization, journals run by his devotees and admirers could serve the purpose; but after the Ramakrishna Mission was founded, it became absolutely necessary to have a journal of its own. The sudden closure of *Prabuddha Bharata* offered an opportunity to the Mission to rejuvenate this well-known journal as its own organ. Personally, I believe that the Ramakrishna Mission would definitely have published another journal of its own even if *Prabuddha Bharata* had not closed down.

In this connection we may add a significant piece of information. The editorials written during the last phase of Rajam Iyer's editorship were not fully in keeping with Swamiji's ideas. After Rajam's death there was no one to follow his novel philosophic path. That was the reason for its sudden closure, as stated by the organizers of the journal. In the obituary article, 'Our Late Editor', it was said:

> To those who could read between the lines, it must have been evident that the *Prabuddha Bharata* presented a peculiar interpretation of the Vedanta, and in this sense the journal had a marked individuality or personality, that of its editor.... It is our belief that the extraordinary popularity of the journal all over the length and breadth of India and even abroad was due not so much to the Vedanta merely as such promulgated by the journal as to the peculiarly beautiful and non-mystical interpretation which the journal presented. And as there is none to our knowledge who can rightly fill the place of the saint-editor whom we have lost, we are unable to continue the journal as other journals or magazines might, under similar circumstances, have been continued.

The first editorial of *Prabuddha Bharata's* new phase expressed, in polite but firm language, the difference between its earlier principles and the new ones. From the same standpoint another significant change was introduced in the journal. The motto of the earlier phase, 'He who knows the Supreme attains the Highest' (from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*), was replaced by another Upaniṣadic dictum, 'Arise! Awake! and stop not till the Goal is reached' (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad*).

With this second phase of *Prabuddha Bharata* was inextricably connected another name — Advaita Ashrama — and even now it continues to be so. For a long time Swamiji had been thinking of founding an ashrama in the lap of the Himalayas, which would be consecrated to Advaita alone, where there would be no rituals or image worship, and where lovers of Vedanta both from the East and the West would assemble and contemplate on the Indivisible Truth with the eternally snow-capped glorious Himalayas in front of them.

Two English souls — the middle-aged Captain Sevier and his wife — were inspired by Swamiji's idea. Ever since they first heard in London the young, radiant thirty-three year old monk, Vivekananda, speak in his rich deep

Prabuddha Bharata editorial office at Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati

Mrs. C. E. Sevier

Capt. J.H. Sevier

Thompson House, Almora

J. J. Goodwin

B.R. Rajam Iyer

voice of the gospel of eternal life and Truth, they had understood that this was the man — the anointed one — and that this was the philosophy they had been seeking all their life. The call had come, they felt, to follow this Truth. Thus Captain J. H. Sevier and Mrs. Charlotte Elizabeth Sevier 'followed' Vivekananda to India, where they began to search for a suitable place for the 'Advaita Ashrama' of Swamiji's dream. However, a suitable place was not immediately available, and yet the journal had to be revived at once. So Almora became its first home.

In May and June of 1898 Swamiji lived with Capt. Sevier and others at Almora in a rented building named 'Thompson House'. This has the distinction of being Swamiji's first Himalayan ashrama and the first office of the resurrected *Prabuddha Bharata*. Capt. Sevier arranged for a hand press, and with its help the next issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* came out. Swami Swarupananda became its editor and Capt. Sevier the manager. In this issue were published two poems of Swamiji — 'To the Awakened India' and 'Requiescat in Pace'. The first was a call to the *Awakened India* by the awakener himself, and the second was a prayer for eternal peace for the departed J. J. Goodwin, the great English soul who sacrificed his life for the sake of India. The new India must arise, but the resurgence needed the awakening of many a noble souls — this was the theme, as it were, the two poems sought to express.

Capt. Sevier was not happy with the cantonment town of Almora as the site for Swamiji's Himalayan ashrama, and he began searching for a better place. Finally a suitable site was found. Fifty miles from Almora town and covering an entire hillock, it was absolutely solitary. The nearest railway station was sixty miles away. It had previously been part of a tea estate and had belonged to a retired general of the Indian Army, Mr. McGregor. Known then as 'Mayeepat', the place was given the new name 'Mayavati'.

The new site provided a home for both Advaita Ashrama and *Prabuddha Bharata*. A small press was brought for the printing of the journal, and some workers were arranged. The main responsibility was on Swami Swarupananda, who was the first President of Advaita Ashrama, and of course the two founders, Capt. Sevier, the manager of *Prabuddha Bharata*, and Mrs. Sevier, his wife. Needless to say, to run a journal in that solitary place, far away from any city, was a spiritual practice in itself. The whole work of conducting the *Prabuddha Bharata* became an unbroken contemplation on the highest Vedantic truth of

Oneness, and on its dissemination. Swamiji was extremely happy with the results. In August 1900 he wrote from New York to a monk of Advaita Ashrama: 'Tell Swarup that I am very much pleased with his conducting of the paper. He is doing splendid work.'[8]

Swamiji had profound faith in and love for Swarupananda. The day Swarupananda joined the Ramakrishna Order, Swamiji said, 'We have made an acquisition today.' This indicates Swamiji's intuition about Swarupananda's deep spirituality. Swarupananda was given sannyāsa on 29 March 1898, and it was precisely during this period that Swamiji was thinking of a journal for the Mission. Swarupananda's premonastic name was Ajay Hari Bandopadhyaya (Banerjee). Before joining the Order, Swarupananda had been, along with Sri Satish Chandra Mukherjee, the editor of the journal *Dawn*. Moreover, Ajay Hari was a staunch Advaitist. Swamiji was then seeking a sincere non-dualist who could look after Advaita Ashrama as well as conduct, in collaboration with the Advaitist Seviers, *Prabuddha Bharata* in the true spirit of non-dualism. Swarupananda fulfilled both these requirements.[9]

The man who dedicated his wealth and labour to build up Advaita Ashrama also sacrificed his life for the cause. On 28 October 1900, Capt. Sevier died in his cherished ashrama at Mayavati. According to his last wish, his body was cremated in the traditional Hindu way on the bank of a stream flowing a little below the ashrama. No memorial has been set up at the spot of Capt. Sevier's cremation, but both the Advaita Ashrama and the *Prabuddha Bharata* stand as the best memorial of this great life.

After Capt. Sevier's death, Mrs. Sevier continued to stay at the Mayavati ashrama for seventeen more years, spending the holy days of widowhood in the midst of the sublime Himalayas. In the ashrama she became the mother, and everyone called her 'Mataji'. To the villagers of the area she was a 'Devi', a goddess. When someone asked her, 'How do you spend the days in such solitude?' she replied, 'I think of Swamiji.'

Advaita Ashrama and *Prabuddha Bharata* are two important chapters in Swamiji's life. It was at the ashrama at Mayavati that Swamiji did his last work of journalism. The last three articles Swamiji wrote were 'Aryans and Tamilians', 'The Social Conference Address', and 'Stray Thoughts on Theosophy', but they were not all published in Swamiji's name. These articles, varied as they were in theme and style, can be considered choice specimens of

journalistic writing even by the most modern standards. In 'Aryans and Tamilians', Vivekananda confronted a burning question of the day — regional separatism. Sustained propaganda was then going on in South India amongst the Tamils trying to convince them that they were ethnologically and culturally quite different from the Aryan descendants of North India. Vivekananda sensed the danger. To him India was for all who belonged to this holy land — whether Tamilians, Aryans, aboriginals, or anything else.

V

But Swamiji did not rest content with two English journals for the spread of his ideas. No doubt English would have to be adopted first as the language for the dissemination of the Vedanta philosophy around the world — and even for multilingual India. But to touch the hearts of the millions, their mother tongue must be the medium. To the vainglorious educated Indians, Swamiji pointed out that the great Saviours of humanity, from Buddha to Ramakrishna, talked and preached in the language of the people. After the *Brahmavadin* and the *Prabuddha Bharata* were firmly established, his attention was diverted to a vernacular journal, the *Udbodhan*, in Bengali. Bengali was his mother tongue, for which he possessed a great love, and the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission was also in Bengal. But more than that, in this very language the great Master, Sri Ramakrishna, uttered his immortal Gospel. But did he only want English and Bengali journals? Swamiji's letters show that he wanted journals in all the major regional languages. In subsequent years, the Ramakrishna Mission, following Swamiji's instructions, started a number of journals in other regional languages from its different centres throughout India.

Even before the *Brahmavadin* was started, Swamiji wrote on 25 September 1894 to Swami Ramakrishnananda: 'I think you have some idea of publishing a paper, what about that?... You shall have to edit a magazine, half in Bengali and half in Hindi — and if possible, another in English. Gupta [Swami Sadananda] can write the Hindi portion, or other Hindi writers may be available for that work. Don't waste time roaming endlessly.'[10] At that time bilingual papers were in vogue. Again, in a letter to Swami Brahmananda in 1895, Swamiji enquired, 'What about the magazine which I heard was going to be started?'[11] And in a letter to Ramakrishnananda, written on 11 April 1895, Swamiji insisted,

'Let Master Mahashay ('M') and you all put your energies together to start a paper.'[12] In the same year, in a letter to his brother disciples at Baranagore Math, Swamiji said: 'What about a certain journal that Haramohan was trying to publish? It will indeed be very nice if you can, conjointly with Kali, Sharat, Hari Master and G. C. Ghosh, manage to start one.'[13] The names mentioned in this letter were persons who could really help in starting a journal.

In the aforesaid letter, Swamiji did not mention one name — that of Saradaprasanna (Swami Trigunatitananda) — considering perhaps that at his young age he could not yet shoulder the burden of starting and managing a journal. But Vivekananda knew what to do and when. That young man, Saradaprasanna, with his couldn't-care-less attitude, was a fearless wanderer, a mountaineer, and a scholar. He later established in San Francisco the first Hindu temple in the West and also founded Vedanta journals in English there. In India, however, Trigunatitananda's great achievement as the first editor of *Udbodhan* earned him a secure place in the history of Bengali journals. *Udbodhan* is presently the only Bengali journal in India published without break for more than a hundred years, and is now the most widely circulated Bengali monthly.

Aware of Swamiji's earnest desire for a Bengali journal, Trigunatitananda wrote him that he was ready to accept the task. In 1895 Swamiji wrote to Swami Brahmananda: 'Sarada is talking about bringing out a Bengali magazine. Help it with all your might. It is not a bad idea. You must not throw cold water on anybody's project. Give up criticism altogether. Help all as long as you find they are doing all right, and in cases where they seem to be going wrong, show them their mistakes gently.'[14]

Visualizing Trigunatitananda's hidden possibilities, Swamiji wrote him in January 1896 a letter in Bengali, full of fire, intermingled with necessary business talk. The tremendous force of the language cannot be properly conveyed in the English translation, given here in part:

> The idea of the paper is good indeed. Onward, forward — no matter what comes! In my letter by the next mail I will send you Rs. 500. Don't worry about money. In this venture five hundred rupees is nothing.... If you can persuade any Arabic-knowing Muslim brother to translate the old Arabic books into Bengali, that will be very nice. There is much of Indian history

in the Persian language. If you get those books gradually translated, they will be a regular good item for your paper. Quite a good number of writers is needed. Then comes the difficult task of getting subscribers. The way out is: You lead a wandering life. Wherever there are Bengali-knowing people, thrust the paper on them.... Never mind anything! Push it on! Shashi, Sharat, Kali, and others can write for the paper. Merely sitting idle and gossiping — no, that won't do. Yes, truly, you have done heroically. Bravo, my boy, well done! Gossip-mongers will lag behind dumbfounded and you will be on top of them with a big jump. They are after their own salvation — are they? Pooh! They will get nothing of the sort, neither for themselves nor for others. Create a terrible commotion — the trumpet sound will echo and re-echo throughout the world. Many are there for picking holes, but when asked to do something, no trace of them. Instantly they vanish. On and on, push forward as far as possible. Commotion and commotion!... Let the world shake to its very foundation.[15]

On 17 January Swamiji again wrote to Trigunatitananda, urging him to proceed with the work he contemplated. And on 26 January Swamiji wrote to Yogananda, requesting him to support Trigunatitananda's venture.

But during the next few months, there was no mention in Swamiji's letters about the Bengali magazine. Possibly it was because Swamiji had become so burdened with the financial responsibilities of the two English journals published from Madras that it was almost impossible for him to help any new journalistic venture. On 14 April 1896, he wrote to Dr. Nanjunda Rao: 'I have also promised to help in starting a magazine in Bengali in Calcutta. Only the first year I used to charge for my lectures. The last two years, my work was entirely free of all charges. As such, I have almost no money to send you or the Calcutta people.'[16]

After returning from the West in early 1897, Swamiji gave more attention to having a Bengali magazine. To Swami Shuddhananda he wrote on 11 July 1897: 'Ask Brahmananda to write to both Abhedananda and Saradananda to send to the Math... Bengali articles and necessary materials for the proposed Bengali journal. Is Girish Babu [G. C. Ghosh] getting up things for the paper?'[17]

This letter indicates that everything was ready for the proposed magazine. But three months later the *Udbodhan* had still not seen the light of day, and Swamiji wrote to Swami Brahamananda (11 October 1897), despondent and

hurt: 'I have rebuked poor Sarada severely. What to do?... I do scold; but I also have much to complain.... Almost suffocated by short breathing, standing and standing, I have written an article for him.'[18] The article referred to is perhaps the now-famous 'Prastābanā' ('Bartamān Samasyā', introductory article) of the *Udbodhan*.

Yet the publication of the journal was still delayed, mainly for pecuniary reasons. In the meantime, Swamiji was so anxious to spread the ideas of the Ramakrishna Mission that he considered using some Bengali papers. In March 1898 he wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda, expressing interest in the *Dawn* magazine: 'The *Dawn* can manage with 200 subscribers to come out regularly on Rs. 40/- an issue expenditure. This is a great fact to know.'[19] The organizer-editor of the paper, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, a disciple of Vijay Krishna Goswami, was a known figure in the Ramakrishna circle. Swamiji wanted to unite all positive intellectual forces to push forward the movement.

When, soon after this, it was decided that the *Prabuddha Bharata* would be published from Almora in the Himalayas as the English mouthpiece of the Order, Swamiji put his mind in earnest to starting the Bengali journal. In fact, it was a necessity. The orthodox Hindu papers continuously attacked Swamiji and his great call for a new order of things, and other sectarian papers — that of the Brahmos, Christian missionaries, and social reformers — joined the chorus. They either attacked directly or maintained a cold silence, broken sometimes with pin-pricking remarks. Their aim was to crush the movement either by direct attacks or by scheming indifference. So it became imperative to reach the people through a Bengali paper.

But the money question loomed large. Seeking help from Miss MacLeod, Swamiji wrote to her on 29 April 1898: '...I am going to start a paper in Calcutta. I will be ever so much obliged if you help me starting that.'[20] Miss MacLeod in all probability consented. Swamiji wrote to Swami Brahmananda on May 20: 'I am trying to raise money for the magazine. See that the sum of Rs. 1,200 which I gave for the magazine is kept only for that account.'[21] Yet not all the other problems were solved. Almost two months later, on 17 July 1898, Swamiji again wrote to Swami Brahmananda: 'My opinion regarding what you have written about Sarada is only that it is difficult to make a magazine in Bengali paying; but if all of you together canvass subscribers from door to door, it may be possible. In this matter, do as you all decide. Poor Sarada has

already been disappointed once. What harm is there if we lose a thousand rupees by supporting such an unselfish and very hardworking person?'[22]

At long last, *Udbodhan* appeared on 14 January 1899 (1st Magh, 1305 BS) as a fortnightly paper. It continued in this way till its tenth year, when it became a monthly journal. Swamiji had wanted it to be a daily paper, but financial constraints made that impossible. The work was started with a fund of two thousand rupees — one thousand given by Swamiji and the other borrowed from Haramohan Mitra. Its first office, which belonged to Girindra Mohan Basak, was at 14 Ramchandra Maitra Lane, Kambulitala, Calcutta. From its inception it was printed in its own press, the Udbodhan Press, set up in the same house. Its first editor and publisher was Swami Trigunatitananda, who remained in that position for over three years, till the Kartik number of 1309 BS.

But we should also remember here the role played by Miss MacLeod. According to her reminiscences:

> Mrs. Ole Bull had given several thousand dollars to found the monastery. I having very little, it took me some years to have eight hundred dollars. One day I said to Swamiji, 'Here is a little money you may be able to use.' He said, 'What? What?' I said, 'Yes.' 'How much?' he asked. And I said, 'Eight hundred dollars.' Instantly he turned to Swami Trigunatita and said, 'There, go and buy your press.' He bought the press which started the *Udbodhan*, the Bengali magazine published by the Ramakrishna Mission.[23]

Though extremely bitter and ill-meaning were the criticisms of the sectarian papers against the newly-founded Ramakrishna Mission and its founder, Swamiji cautioned that *Udbodhan* should not indulge in dirty polemical writings; instead it should present Vedantic ideas clearly and boldly, thereby dispelling vicious clouds spread by reactionary forces which garbed themselves now and then in the cloak of social reform and progress.

Udbodhan's list of contributors, even in the first few years, was striking. It included a number of littérateurs, Sanskritists, historians, archaeologists, linguists, educationists, etc. These include: Girish Chandra Ghosh, Pramathanath Tarkabhusan, Haraprasad Shastri, Amulyacharan Vidyabhusan, Mokshadacharan Samadhyay, and Kshirodprasad Vidyabinod. Swami Saradananda's powerful articles on dynamic religion, based on the ideas propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and then Swami Shuddhananda's

Bengali renderings of Swamiji's books and published speeches — including *Rāja-Yoga*, *Jñāna-Yoga*, *Karma-Yoga*, and *Bhārate Vivekananda* — were assets of the journal. Shuddhananda's translations of Vivekananda's works were so lucid and forceful that to many they were the original writings of Swamiji. This notion prevails even now. In the field of literary translation in Bengali, Swami Shuddhananda undoubtedly is in the first rank.

Besides this, the *Udbodhan* made another glorious contribution: It made Vivekananda a writer of Bengali literature. It can be said without fear of contradiction that, had there been no *Udbodhan*, Vivekananda would not have turned out to be such a significant writer of Bengali literature. All the major Bengali prose works of Swamiji — 'Bartamān Bhārat', 'Parivrājaka', 'Prāchya O Pāshcātya', 'Bhābbār Kothā' — and his poetic creations (included in 'Birabāni') were published in this paper.

After his return to India, Swamiji seriously thought of giving a new shape to the Bengali language, as he was not satisfied with its structure. According to him, the use of too many verbs saps a language of its force. The function of the verbs can sometimes be accomplished by the judicious use of adjectives and other things. Grandeur, solemnity, and lucidity should be the aim of serious intellectual writing. His ideas on this were expressed in his celebrated socio-historical study 'Bartamān Bhārat' as well as some other articles.

This heavy and ornate style was acclaimed by the well-known editor of the monthly *Sāhitya*, Suresh Chandra Samajpati, though he had not yet seen Vivekananda's Bengali writing. But to him, 'genius is ever innovative'. For the most part, however, criticism was the order of the day. It was too hard a style, difficult to understand, and impossible to follow. Even in Swamiji's own circle his style did not find favour. Swamiji himself understood that he was fighting a tough battle, yet he knew that the sign of the times pointed to colloquial Bengali. Yes, we should and must reach the people, he thought — and that through spoken Bengali. Again, Ramakrishna's language was a remarkable example of that style.

Once decided, Swamiji went on using spoken Bengali in all his subsequent important works. Many thought Swamiji was simply being frivolous and flippant, and they mimicked his language in their journals. But Swamiji was unperturbed. He wrote a short but brilliant article, 'Bānglā Bhāshā', in support of his newly-adopted style which was a landmark in the history of Bengali

language and literature. Till now, Pramatha Choudhury has been given the entire credit for propagating the use of colloquial Bengali in literature. Choudhury offered in a number of articles his reasons in support of his cause, yet all that and more were expressed in Swamiji's short article written ten years earlier.

Now, something about the first editor of the paper, Swami Trigunatitananda: He was a remarkable yet strange man, with the most uncommon habits. In his school and college days he was a brilliant student, but he left college because he was marked by Ramakrishna to have a 'deathless death'. He could at times eat enormously, as if by a miracle, and then for days could go happily with no food at all. Deeply concerned about the hungry millions around him, he wrote a monograph on famine which would do credit to a recognized social scientist. The term philologist might also be used about him for his comprehensive article, published in the *Udbodhan*, on the Bengali language. This was written in connection with the Presidential Address given by the revered savant Dwijendra Nath Tagore at the Sahitya Parishad annual meeting. Moreover, Trigunatitananda's dedication was without parallel. A pen-picture of him, drawn by Kumud Bandhu Sen, is given here:

> The memory is shining in my mind's eye of the time when the Udbodhan made its first appearance.... A small fortnightly paper, with meagre capital, accommodated in a place not its own, a small printing press — despite all these, a golden picture of its future caught the imagination of its near ones.... I can very well remember Swami Trigunatitananda, the founder-editor of the paper. I call him the 'founder' because, following Swami Vivekananda's direction and help, he and he alone shouldered the responsibility of editing and publishing the paper, doing tremendously hard work. I have seen him working in starving or near starving condition for days together, in winter, summer, and rain. He not only supervised the work if the compositor was absent or the pressman ill, but he also ran hither and thither in search of other workers. He did the same when purchasing cheap press materials. Single-handedly he went on working — assisting the pressmen in their job, collecting articles from others, and writing articles for the paper. If the schedule for the release of the paper was not maintained, Swamiji scolded him like anything. He also attended on sick workers of the paper and collected medicine and suitable diet for them. Even all this tremendously hard work

> could not remove the smile from his happy face — and there was no trace of weariness visible in him. Most of the compositors lived in the slums. Without hesitation he entered the places in search of them. I saw him many days drinking water in the afternoon at the residence of Manindra Krishna Gupta, a disciple and devotee of Sri Sri Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna]. I gathered from him that till then he had not taken any food. Manindra Krishna was the grandson (from the daughter's side) of the great poet Iswar Chandra Gupta, whose paper, *Sambād Prabhākar*, he was then editing. They ran the Prabhakar Press, and Swami Trigunatita used to go there for advice. Despite his utmost efforts, errors in proof-reading crept in.... Being sharply rebuked by Swamiji for these, he kept quiet.... Coming to know about Trigunatita's superhuman labour and his constant visits to slum areas for the paper and press, Girish Chandra Ghosh tried to prevail upon Swami Vivekananda to sell the press. Swami Trigunatita then put his energy to increasing the number of subscribers.[24]

But Vivekananda's criticisms were just show, meant for cautioning and improving things. He would not be satisfied with anything but the best. Actually his gratitude was unbounded for the work, and equally immense was his love for the one who had done it. After the scolding was over and Trigunatitananda had left, Swamiji poured out his heart praising his dear brother for his unthinkable achievement. Almost in a choked voice, he uttered with deep feeling: 'Yes, only a son of Ramakrishna can do such great things. They are not ordinary people. For the good of the many, they have assumed this new birth.'

Udbodhan's days of glory did not fade away even after Swamiji's demise, nor after Swami Trigunatitananda left for the USA. Swami Shuddhananda then took charge, guided by Swami Saradananda, the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The pages of the journal were sanctified by chapters of the immortal *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*), recorded by the ever-glorious 'M'. Again, the *Udbodhan* had the incomparable glory of serializing the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* (*Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*) by Swami Saradananda. This comprehensive biography of Sri Ramakrishna, written by a direct monastic disciple of the Master, is now considered a classic.

VI

Was *Udbodhan* just a journal? Definitely not. *Udbodhan* was the embodiment of the message of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and of the eternal Indian religion and culture — at least this was the goal of the paper. Swami Saradananda expressed its ideals clearly and positively in the issue of 1 Magh 1309 BS: 'The Truth Sri Ramakrishna preached, and which is nothing but the manifestation of the eternal Brahman, combined with the unique powers of *rajas* of the heroic Vivekananda, made the advent of the *Udbodhan* possible for the continuous good of the world. Despite its young age, it is full of unbounded strength; though small in size, it is determined to benefit a small area of India now, but in the future the whole country.'

Unbelievable? Yes. But was it only Saradananda's wishful thinking? But what about Vivekananda? His vision was large and more far reaching. 'It is now the turn of India', he declared. The Prophet Vivekananda visualized that in India there will be an 'intermingling of gigantic forces' — of Indian spirituality and European practicality. But the real picture of India was then quite different. At that time the country was drowned in *tamas* (dark ignorance). Dull and stupid people tried to hide their ignorance with boastful claims of higher knowledge, while those who were utterly lazy posed as men of renunciation. It was a country 'where knowledge consists only in getting some books by heart, genius consists in chewing the cud of others' thoughts, and the highest glory consists in taking the name of ancestors: do we require any other proof to show that that country is being day by day drowned in utter Tamas?'[25]

'Therefore Sattva or absolute purity is now far away from us', Swamiji admitted. In order to overcome *tamas*, a person has to pass through *rajas* (intense activity). So Indians in general must adopt the tremendous active life of the West and combine it with deep spirituality, which is their precious inheritance. '...*Udbodhan* is to help the union and intermingling of these two forces, as far as it lies in its power', said Vivekananda. In his inimitable Bengali, vibrating with energy, Vivekananda instructed us:

> Let rays of light come in, in sharp-driving showers from the four quarters of the earth; let the intense flood of light flow in from the West — what of that? Whatever is weak and corrupt is liable to die — what are we to do with

it? If it goes, let it go, what harm does it do to us? What is strong and invigorating is immortal. Who can destroy that?[26]

References

[1] From the little information available to us about Alasinga's life, we know that he was born in 1865 at Chikmagalur, Mysore. His father, Narasimhacharya, was not rich, but he was high-born and belonged to the Sri Vaishnava sect. Alasinga attended the Madras Presidency College and Madras Christian College, and in 1884 he received a degree in science. As further study was not possible due to financial difficulties, he got a job of a teacher in a school. In this capacity he was so efficient that he was soon offered the post of headmaster at Pachalappa's High School at Madras, a post he held till his death. Shortly before he died, he also taught physics and chemistry at Pachalappa's College.

The calumny spread against Hinduism by Christian missionaries deeply pained Alasinga, and he wanted to find a solution. His uncle, Yogi Parthasarathy Ayyangar, who was a famous Vaishnava scholar associated with the Hindu League in America, informed Alasinga about the Parliament of Religions to be held in Chicago. Alasinga then began searching for a man to represent Hinduism at the Parliament. After meeting Vivekananda he realized that Swamiji was a God-appointed man. Alasinga had a circle of educated friends interested in religion, and he was also intimately acquainted with Annie Besant. Besides the *Brahmavadin*, Alasinga was also associated with *India*, a journal published by Thirumalacharya, a political extremist. Alasinga took sympathetic interest in this journal, and to help it he brought the celebrated Tamil poet Subramanya Bharati from the journal *Swadesa-Mitran*.

[2] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1963], V:35. Hearafter *CW*.

[3] Letters dated 31 August 1894; 29 September 1894; another undated letter of the same year; 6 May 1895; 28 May 1895; 1 July 1895; 30 July 1895, etc.

[4] The *Hindu* of Madras expressed its appreciation for Alasinga's dedicated service to Swami Vivekananda's cause. And Max Müller praised the *Brahmavadin* highly. There was a proposal that a collection of selected essays from the *Brahmavadin* be published. On being requested, Max Müller sent a preface for the book, but unfortunately the book was never published. In the preface he wrote that he had

gone through most of the essays published in the *Brahmavadin*, and that they had successfully expressed the extraordinary strength-giving truths of Vedanta.

[5] With Swamiji's help, Sister Nivedita took up this work, writing a memorable volume known as *Cradle Tales of Hinduism*.

[6] 'On reading the article in the *Brahmavadin* in 1895 we felt the hand of a great man and longed to find him. And when we sought him out, we found him an unpolished diamond' (quoted from the article by G.S.K., published in *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1898).

[7] Soon after, however, Swamiji understood that people were hurt over his scathing criticism and he became cautious lest his critical remarks of this minor aspect discourage the organizers and undermine the work of the journal itself. That is why he wrote on 26 August 1896: 'Go on bravely — never mind about designs and other details at present — "With the horse will come the reins"' (*CW*, V:114).

[8] *CW*, VIII:530.

[9] But Swarupananda did not live long. He died only a few years after his Master, Vivekananda. A portion of the *Mysore Herald's* tribute to him on 28 August 1906 reads: 'The Swami was 38 years old when he died. He took Sannyāsam 8 years ago and immediately became the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*.... He was a devoted student of Shankaracharya and was very well-known for his Sanskrit and English scholarship.' In the obituary published in *Prabuddha Bharata* (July 1906) it was said: 'It was under his able editorship that the *Prabuddha Bharata* attained to its present wide circulation. What he sought were the attainments of high ideals, which could have emanated from nothing but the greatest and purest aspiration and an inextinguishable belief in the truth of Advaita.'

[10] *Bāni O Rachana*, VI:488 [hereafter, *Bani*] (trans. by author); *CW* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati Memorial ed.), VI:274.

[11] *CW*, VI:314; *Bani*, VII: 71.

[12] *Bani*, VII:99-100 (trans. by author); *CW*, VI:305.

[13] *Bani*, VII:195 (trans. by author); *CW*, VI:324.

[14] *CW*, VI:326; *Bani*, VII:210.

[15] *Bani*, VII:156 (trans. by author); *CW*, VI:355.

[16] *CW*, V:107-08; *Bani*, VII:235.

[17] *Bani*, VII:370 (trans. by author); *CW*, VII:507.

[18] *CW*, VIII:432-33; *Bani*, VIII:8-10.

[19] *CW*, VIII:447; *Bani*, VIII:29.

[20] *CW*, VIII:451; *Bani*, VIII:35.

[21] *CW*, VIII:453; *Bani*, VIII:37.

[22] *CW*, VIII:454; *Bani*, VIII:40.

[23] His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1961], 245.

[24] Sankari Prasad Basu, *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharat Varsha* [Calcutta: Mondal Book House, 1981], III:53-54.

[25] *CW*, IV:405; *Bani*, VI:33.

[26] *CW*, IV:406-07; *Bani*, VI:34.

Brahmavadin

ITS ROLE IN DOCUMENTING THE EARLIEST PHILANTHROPIC ACTIVITIES OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

SUNILBIHARI GHOSH

To trace the history of the philanthropic activities of Ramakrishna Mission in Indian newspapers and journals is a formidable task. The period covers more than one hundred years and the number of papers published in India is enormous. Therefore, we would like to cover only the formative period of Ramakrishna Mission's philanthropic activities as documented in the *Brahmavadin*. During the lifetime of Swami Vivekananda, three journals, i.e. *Brahmavadin* and *Prabuddha Bharata* in English, and *Udbodhan* in Bengali, had dedicated themselves to propagate the ideals of the Vedantic religion and the teachings of Swamiji. Two of them, viz. *Prabuddha Bharata* and *Udbodhan*, are the mouthpieces of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, being edited by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. *Prabuddha Bharata* was edited by Rajam Iyer only during the first two years of its formative period. It was then being published from Madras. It ceased publication after Rajam Iyer's untimely death in May 1898 at the age of 26. *Prabuddha Bharata*, however, resumed publication in August 1898 from Almora. Since then it has been edited by the monks of the Order and has been running successfully. In 1899 it was shifted to Mayavati. Both the journals have celebrated their centenary. It is obvious that these two journals have been publishing much more information about the organization and its activities than others.

Brahmavadin — a Brief Introduction

The first journal published 'under the advice and with the encouragement of Swami Vivekananda' was the *Brahmavadin*. It made its appearance in Madras on Saturday, 14 September 1895, as a 'Religious and Philosophical Journal'. It was printed by Thompson and Co. In its prospectus it was stated that '...it is proposed to start a weekly journal. The main object of the journal is to propagate the principles of the Vedanta Religion of India....' The prospectus was signed by G. Venkataranga Rao, M.A.; M. C. Nanjunda Rao, B.A., M.B. & C.M.; and M. C. Alasinga Perumal, B.A. Even though the prospectus stated that it was to be a weekly journal, in fact, it was a fortnightly magazine. For the first two years it was brought out in a bigger format; afterwards its size was reduced. The number of pages varied. The first issue contained 14 pages. The *Brahmavadin* was not an official organ of the Ramakrishna Mission, but its contribution to the Mission is unfathomable. As the early years of the journals of the Ramakrishna Order have already been discussed in the preceding article, this article shall confine itself to the news and reports on the Mission's philanthropic activities published only in the *Brahmavadin*, which thus rendered a great service and contributed towards the furtherance of the ideals of the Ramakrishna Movement.

It should be noted that the present concept of the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission is not the same as it was one hundred years ago. Broadly speaking, at present the Ramakrishna Math looks after the spiritual and religious activities, whereas the Mission engages itself in the philanthropic services. But in the earlier days an all-embracing term 'The Vedanta Missionary Work' was used very often. Swami Sachchidananda's letter to the Editor of the *Brahmavadin* states that (Vol. 5, 1899):

> ...under the ideal as conceived by the term 'Vedanta Work' is to be included not only the work of preaching the sublime truths of the Vedanta to the religious aspirants but any work, begun and done with the true spirit of 'work unattached' of the Gita, whether in the shape of physical, intellectual or spiritual help, has a just claim to have its place in the denotation of the term.

An analysis of the information published in the *Brahmavadin* reveals that stress was laid on news of the philanthropic activities of the Mission. Of course, the readers were served with the spiritual teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji, and others as well. From the very first issue, the *Brahmavadin* published 'Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna' almost regularly, sometimes on the first page. It announced:

> To enable our readers to see how truly catholic our great religious teachers have been, we extract...an English version of some of the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Guru of Swami Vivekananda. Through the kindness of Babu Siris Chandra Bose, B.L., District Munsif of Ghazipur, we are in a position to announce that a translation of the Uktis or sayings of the great Paramahansa will be published in these columns from time to time.

Out of the 26 fortnightly issues for the year 1895-96, it is found that only issue no. 11 (January 25, 1896) does not contain the sayings. In the first year, 198 sayings in all were published. Besides this, the works of Swami Vivekananda were serially published in 'The Open Column', e.g. 'Bhakti-Yoga', 'Karma-Yoga', 'The Real and the Apparent Man', 'Song of the Sannyāsin'; an article on 'Tantrikism or the Worship of Shakti' by Swami Saradananda; 'The Prospect of the Vedanta in the West' by E. T. Sturdy; Letters of Swami Vivekananda, viz. Brooklyn Letter, London Letter, New York Letter, etc.; Greenacre Letter on Swami Saradananda's work, and so on. Detailed reports on Swamiji's work in America were submitted by 'K' (Swami Kripananda, an American disciple of Swamiji). An account of Swami Vivekananda and his work written by MNG (Mahendranath Gupta, i.e. 'M' of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) was published on 12 October 1895. 'The Swami Saradananda at the Metaphysical club' was published on 27 March 1897.

The Mission's Relief Activities as Reported in the Brahmavadin

The Ramakrishna Mission, precisely 'The Ramakrishna Mission Association', was established on 1 May 1897. The *Brahmavadin* published this information in its issue of 15 September 1897. It is strange that there was a lapse of more than three months before it was able to publish this crucial piece of information. Can it be assumed that Swamiji himself thought it was too

early to make it known? In this context, we may refer to the *Indian Mirror*, a well-known newspaper of that period, which was edited by Narendranath Sen. This paper was always prompt to publish any news concerning Swamiji. The activities of Swamiji starting from 11 September 1893 occupied a large space in the columns of the *Mirror*. On 2 May 1897 we find a report in the *Mirror*: 'A correspondent writes — Swami Vivekananda arrived from Darjiling on Wednesday last with his disciples....' Then 'Swami Vivekananda paid a visit to the Mahākāli Pāthshālā on Thursday last (8 May).' The visit was on 5 May. On 27 May 1897, under the heading 'News', it was stated:

> ...In Calcutta he (Swamiji) will deliver a series of lectures and will carry out a scheme for imparting religious training to our young men on a very liberal basis. In addition to this, he means to establish a monastery.... An organization has already been set on foot in Calcutta, which will carry on the work already started by Swami Vivekananda. Though we do not know much of this organization, yet we are in a position to say that it has already commenced to work in a satisfactory manner. The object of this organization is two-fold, first to help people to form a highly spiritual life, and secondly, to try to propagate the doctrines, already given to the world by Swami Vivekananda.

Does this news refer to the newly formed Ramakrishna Mission Association? If so, then this may be considered as the first mention of the Mission in the press.

It has been stated that the *Brahmavadin* published detailed reports of the social and philanthropic activities of the Ramakrishna Mission. The relief work and service to humanity *in an organized way* was started by the Ramakrishna Mission on 15 May 1897. It was organized by Swami Akhandananda in Murshidabad with a capital of Rs. 150 (sent by Swamiji) and the assistance of Swami Nityananda and Brahmachāri Suren (afterwards Swami Sureswarananda). This relief work was named the 'Mahabodhi Famine Relief Works'. In the first phase monetary help was received from the Mahabodhi Society through the courtesy of the then Secretary of the Society, Charuchandra Bose. Bose was a regular visitor to the Ramakrishna Mission Association. He used to read papers on Buddhism at its weekly meetings. The news of this relief work was printed in the *Mirror* on 6 and 24 June 1897. The same report was published

in the July-August 1897 issue of the *Journal of the Maha-Bodhi Society*. Swami Ramakrishnananda, who was at that time in Madras, translated Swami Akhandananda's reports into English and had them published in the *Brahmavadin* as a series of letters. The first letter was printed in the 19 June 1897 issue. The following fragment was printed below the letter:

> We beg to acknowledge the receipt of 74 dollars (Rs. 237-2-0) from Mrs. Wyman of Brooklyn, America, towards famine relief and the amount has been forwarded for distribution.

It may be recalled that Mrs. Wyman (Elizabeth Anne Wyman) was the wife of Dr. John C. Wyman, who composed a poem on Swamiji titled 'A Tribute of Affection', which was printed in the 15 July 1899 issue of the *Brahmavadin*. In the issue of July 17, 1897, the formation of Alambazar Famine Fund was announced:

> We beg to acknowledge the receipt of 5 £ 2 s (Rs. 80 13 As.) from a friend in Detroit, Michigan, USA, contributed towards the Alambazar Famine Fund.

In the same issue a report of the service rendered between 1st June and 22nd June is available. It is found that 53 maunds 37 seers and 2 pounds of foodstuff was distributed among 7,461 persons. Swami Ramakrishnananda, in his letter dated 16 July, quoted Swami Akhandananda:

> It is impossible in a letter to describe the extreme suffering of the inhabitants of these villages resulting from starvation.... Herewith we take the opportunity of expressing our heartfelt thanks to Babus Nitya Gopal Mukerji, the Deputy Magistrate of Berhampore, and Vaikunthanath Sen, the very popular Vakil of that place, through whose influence the good District Magistrate has consented to let us have rice at the rate of Rs. 2 a maund.

Swami Ramakrishnananda further wrote:

> The Swami (Akhandananda) is working with ardent faith, and where there is faith there must be success...we are glad to inform...that we have received a big contribution of Rs. 500 from a generous man from Bellary....

While Akhandananda served Berhampore, Swami Trigunatitananda went to Dinajpur for famine relief. Swami Brahmananda sent a report to the *Brahmavadin* (Vol. 3, pp. 372-73):

The Ramakrishna Mission Famine Relief Work, Calcutta

Mr. N. Bonham Carter, the Collector of Dinajpur, wrote to the Government regarding the famine relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission in Dinajpur as follows:

'I cannot close my report without referring to the good work done by Swami Trigunatita, a member of the Ramakrishna Mission. The Swami, hearing of the distress in this district, came to me and said that his Mission was prepared to give assistance here as had been done in Berhampore.... Here the Swami took up his abode in great discomfort and distributed rice gratis to the deserving cases. He made every endeavour to arrive at the truth...the relief was given irrespective of caste and creed. Government relief work would be much relieved if more such unselfish work were done...the Swami managed the whole work himself without the assistance of myself or any other else.' Swami Trigunatita's relief work covered 270 villages during the period August 31 to October 27. 1838 persons, of which 1031 were Mohamedans, 755 Hindus, and 52 Christians, were given relief. On the 3rd December 1897 a public meeting was held at Dinajpur to present an address of thanks to the Swami. The leading residents attended the meeting which was presided over by Mr. N. Bonham Carter, the Collector. In his presidential address Mr. Carter said, '...I fully realize the Swami's good and disinterested work. He had nothing to bind him to this district. His only object was to do good to mankind.... The Swami did work in the best possible way...the Swami did every work himself and with his own hands. This is the secret of success...the Swami carried on work in a methodical way....' Then the President read the address of thanks printed in gold. After this, Swami Trigunatita spoke in reply for two hours on the 'History and Philosophy of Famine'. His speech was a grand one.

The *Brahmavadin* reports in its December 1, 1897 issue:

Another famine relief work was opened at Deoghar (Santhal Parganas) by Swami Virajananda of the Alambazar Math...the number of men and

women who were relieved from the distress of hunger and death were about 250.

Swami Akhandananda, with the help of the European Collector of Murshidabad, started an orphanage at Murshidabad to impart secular and spiritual training to orphans irrespective of caste, creed or nationality. The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, 'rendered pure and selfless for such active philanthropy by the touch of their Master', were thanked immensely.

A letter of Swami Ramakrishnananda published in the *Brahmavadin* may be quoted briefly. Regarding Swami Akhandananda's disinterested labours he writes (Vol. 3, 1898, pp. 772-74):

> ...the Swami found two helpless orphans...whom he accordingly brought with him and ever since that period has been acting as a father and mother to them. The forlorn condition of the two orphans also affected the heart of the noble and high-souled Mr. Levinge (the Collector of Murshidabad), and he requested the Swami to establish an orphanage, the land necessary for the purpose, he being ready to grant to him.... Fifty bighas (17 acres) of land were forthwith granted to him from the Government and a shade also was erected in it as a home of the orphans. This is the history of the orphanage of Mahula which now shelters 8 orphans....

Swami Akhandananda's work turned from famine relief to flood-relief. In September 1899, some villages in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar were swept away by flood. Many families perished, cattle were drowned by the thousands, and most people became simply homeless, foodless, and without clothing.

> The Swami went to the scenes of disaster about the middle of October, and obtaining permission from the District Magistrate J. C. Cumming Esq., who was already in the field to work in the distressed area, exhorted the people of the place to join in the cause of humanity and succeeded in enlisting the sympathy of some of the nobility and gentry...he at once set about his work.... Cholera broke out in several places, and specially at Pakiserai, where he had to nurse some helpless patients.... the Swami heartily thanks the good Professors and students of the Bhagalpur College and other gentlemen.... Mr. Cumming, in a letter to the Swami, thanked him and the members of the Ramakrishna Mission for his work in the flood-swept areas

of his district, and he was so satisfied with the work of the Swami that he gladly contributed Rs. 50 — by way of donation to the Swami's Orphanage Fund (Swami Sachchidananda's letter).

Swami Swarupananda started his famine relief work in Kissengarh in 1900. The Swami opened a relief station to care for the helpless orphans in a much afflicted district. *Student*, a New York based journal, while publishing a report under 'Famine in India', states:

> Natives can reach the suffering Hindus far more effectually than foreigners, and all classes trust the Sannyāsins. Swami Swarupananda is of the same Order as Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Saradananda issued a report of famine relief works conducted by the Ramakrishna Mission from November 1899 to March 1900, which was published in the *Brahmavadin* (Vol. 5, pp. 624-27). Mr. J. R. Dunlop Smith, Major, Famine Commissioner, visited Kissengarh by the end of February 1900. In his report dated 10 March 1900, the Commissioner states:

> An orphanage was opened in the city by the Durbar on the 28th December. It is now managed entirely by the Ramakrishna Mission of Bengal under the supervision of the Diwan. These missionaries are Vedantists. The head of the mission is Swami Vivekananda.... There are now in the orphanage 54 boys and 23 girls.... The children are in excellent condition and appear to receive every attention. They are all very happy....

Swami Akhandananda paid much attention to imparting education to his orphan children. On 15 March 1903, Mr. P. Mukherjee, Inspector of Schools, Presidency Division, visited the Ramakrishna Orphanage and Lower Primary School at Sargachi near Bhabda, Murshidabad. He reported:

> I was much pleased with what I saw there. The Swami, a disciple of Ramakrishna (Paramahansa), seems to have the sympathy of the local public both European and Indian in the useful work that is being done by him. The boarders are taught carpentry, weaving and tailor's work....

Reports were published regularly in the *Brahmavadin* on the noble work done by the Kankhal Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Benares Ramakrishna

Mission Home of Service, and other similar organizations. It may be borne in mind that the *Prabuddha Bharata* from Mayavati began publishing exhaustive reports of the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission. It was evident that the same information published in the *Brahmavadin* bore less importance.

Under the heading 'Vedanta Missionary Work', the *Brahmavadin* published detailed reports of the work done by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order in various parts of the USA, Britain, and India. The speeches of Swamis Abhedananda, Saradananda, and Abhayananda (a woman disciple of Swamiji) were reported thoroughly. From Calcutta Dr. Shashibhushan Ghosh, M.B., one of the Assistant Secretaries of the Ramakrishna Mission, used to send fortnightly/monthly reports of the Mission. When Calcutta was in the clutches of the plague, the Ramakrishna Mission, under the able stewardship of Sister Nivedita and later Swami Sadananda, performed a pioneering service. The *Mirror*, the *Mahratta* (of Bal Gangadhar Tilak), the *Indian Nation* (of N. Sen), and many other papers devoted much space to this epoch-making work. The *Brahmavadin* did publish these reports but in a mild tone. The warmth and exuberance of the *Mahratta* was absent in those writings. The *Brahmavadin* did not last long. For two decades it played a very important role heralding the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission in its formative years.

In conclusion, it may be stated that in spite of its short life, the contribution of the *Brahmavadin* in documenting the earliest philanthropic history of the Ramakrishna Mission was phenomenal. The reader may refer to Prof. Sankari Prasad Basu's monumental work *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharat Varsha* (7 volumes in Bengali) and *Vivekananda in Indian Newspapers, 1893-1902* (edited by Prof. Sankari Prasad Basu and Sunilbihari Ghosh) and well conclude that only some of the newspapers and magazines have enthusiastically and painstakingly recorded the childhood history of the Ramakrishna Mission's activities. With the exception of the *Prabuddha Bharata* and the *Udbodhan*, the *Brahmavadin* stands head and shoulders above its peers for disseminating a faithful and authentic account of the Ramakrishna Mission's activities.

Role of Non-Affiliated Centres in Ramakrishna Movement

SWAMI SHIVAMAYANANDA AND SWAMI BHAJANANANDA

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find that disciples began to gather around him from the latter part of 1870s. Even in those early years it was seen that the disciples belonged to two fairly distinct groups. One group consisted of young men, most of whom were unmarried and studying in school or college. The other group consisted of householders following different walks of life. Sri Ramakrishna trained the two groups in two different ways. The first group he trained to renounce the world and become monks.

The distinction between the two groups became more accentuated during Sri Ramakrishna's last illness at Shyampukur and Cossipore. The young men belonging to the first group took up round-the clock nursing and care of the Master, while the householder devotees provided the financial support. Sri Ramakrishna bonded the two groups together with the unbreakable ties of his eternal love. This bond of love persisted even after the Master's passing away. The young men formed a monastic brotherhood which later became the Ramakrishna Math, while the householder devotees continued to support the young monks.

Place of Lay Devotees in Ramakrishna Movement

It may be mentioned here that both the groups produced men of outstanding spiritual calibre. The monastic group included the direct disciples, every one of whom was a shining example of spiritual enlightenment. The lay group produced great spiritual personalities like Nag Mahashay, Balaram Babu,

Ramchandra Datta and Mahendranath Gupta. During the early years of Belur Math, the direct disciples, particularly Swami Premananda, took great pains to serve the lay devotees and keep them close to the Math. The lay devotees on their part reciprocated the trust reposed on them by providing solid support to Ramakrishna Math and Mission and participating in their activities. Swami Premananda paid this tribute to lay devotees in one of his letters:

> The devotees of God are our only friends, relatives, children and everything. In happiness and misery you are our very own. It is no small wonder that you, though living in the world, seek to attain pure devotion to Sri Ramakrishna. Look at the general run of people. Most of them are delirious, intoxicated by wealth, fame or the pride of learning. In this terrible desert of a world, the Lord is the only source of peace and bliss.

The role played by Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in holding lay devotees close to Ramakrishna Movement can be compared only to that of Sri Ramakrishna himself. She understood the difficulties and sufferings of householders more than anybody else. Her love and compassion for them knew no bounds, and she went out of the way to help them, bearing patiently the many troubles that some of them gave her. Her famous statement, which came spontaneously from her great Mother Heart, 'Just as Sharat (Swami Saradananda) is my son, so also is Amjad (the dacoit)', summed up her superhuman equality of vision and love for all.

The Main Channel

It is an indisputable fact that Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, brought into existence by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, serve as the main channel for the propagation of their power and message. While consecrating the Belur Math premises on 9 December 1898, Swamiji made this prophetic statement: 'From this centre of universal toleration will go forth the shining message of goodwill and peace and harmony to deluge the whole world.' This statement of Swamiji is being proved to be true. With Belur Math as the centre, the message of the Holy Trio is spreading all over India and several parts of the world through the more than 160 branch centers of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Although the preeminence of these two institutions as the main channel for the propagation of the message and power of the Holy Trio is an undisputed fact, it is also quite obvious that these institutions cannot remain the only channel. The message of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji is so universal, so powerful and so eagerly sought that it cannot be confined to only one channel, one tradition or one institution. It needs multifarious channels, to suit the needs of diverse cultures, societies and human temperaments. To fulfil this diversity of needs, hundreds of small and big Ashramas, study-circles and other types of organizations have sprung up all over India, especially in Bengal, which function independently of the administrative control of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

These 'non-affiliated centres', which are sometimes referred to as 'private centres', are found in almost every state in India. Even a small state like Kerala has not less than 30 such non-affiliated centres. Even in Kashmir, from where most of the Hindus have fled, a small Ramakrishna Ashram is surviving precariously, under the most trying conditions, shedding the light of knowledge like a flickering lamp in a windy place. The total number of non-affiliated centres in West Bengal is guesstimated to be over a thousand. Tamil Nadu has over 160 unaffiliated centres. Andhra Pradesh has about 107, Karnataka has about 67 and Tripura State has more than 40 non-affiliated centres. The other states have much smaller numbers of such centres.

Origin of Non-Affiliated Centres

The non-affiliated centres originate in different ways. The most common way is through a group of devotees of a locality who are inspired by the speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda or by the books on Sri Ramakrishna. Many of these devotees may have already come into contact with Ramakrishna Math or Mission, and some of them may have taken initiation from the President or Vice President of the Order. During the early years of Ramakrishna Movement, initiated disciples of Holy Mother, Swamiji, Swami Brahmananda and other direct disciples started several centres.

The founding of Sevashram or Home of Service in Varanasi (also known as Benares and Kashi) is a well-known example of how non-affiliated centres get started. Some young men under the leadership of Charuchandra Das

(who later became Swami Shubhananda), Kedarnath Moulik (later Swami Achalananda), Jaminiranjan Majumdar and others, who had been inspired by the spiritual message of Sri Ramakrishna and the new ideal of service to man as service to God propounded by Swami Vivekananda, together formed an institution called 'Poor Men's Relief Association'. It was located in a house rented for Rs. 5 per month in the Ramapura quarters of Varanasi. Through the Association the young men 'endeavoured with their limited means to provide food, shelter and medical aid to destitute pilgrims, helpless widows, and aged persons lying ill on the streets and ghats of the city.' A few days later Jaminiranjan, then a penniless youth living on charity as a student of Sanskrit, was moved by the misery of an old woman lying sick on the roadside unattended. With four annas got by begging from a passing gentleman, he removed the old woman to a hospital. He enlisted the cooperation of Charuchandra and others to start a small hospital at Dashaswamedha Ghat, which was later shifted to Ramapura in Varanasi. It was at that time that Swamiji visited Varanasi. He was very much pleased to see the zeal of the young men. He blessed them and wrote an appeal to accompany the first report of their Association. A few years later, the Association was taken over by Ramakrishna Mission and renamed Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama or Home of Service.

During the early years of Ramakrishna Movement, several non-affiliated centres were started under the influence of the direct disciples who visited the places and inspired the people there to form groups and take up various service activities. The visit of Swamiji, Swami Saradananda, Swami Premananda and Swami Subodhananda to several places in the erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh) created a tremendous impact in the minds of the people there. Wherever these great souls went, they created a great stir. Under their influence several centres were started in Dhaka, Barisal and other places. Some of these centres later got affiliated to Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Another noteworthy instance of the impact of direct disciples is the preaching work of Swami Ramakrishnananda (also known as Shashi Maharaj) in south India. After establishing a branch centre of Ramakrishna Math in Madras (now known as Chennai) he visited several places in south India and Burma. The lectures he delivered in Ulsoor (in Karnataka), in Trivandrum (in Kerala)

and in Burma led to the founding of study circles in those places, which were later integrated into Ramakrishna Math as branch centres.

Out of the 8 official branches of Ramakrishna Math and more than 30 non-affiliated centers in Kerala, the majority of them were started under the influence of Swami Nirmalananda.

It may be mentioned here that some of the monastic brothers who were members of the Ramakrishna Order, left the Order owing to some reason or other and started independent centers. A few of them, like the one at Nimpith in West Bengal, are pretty big ones.

Importance of Non-Affiliated Centres

As already mentioned, owing to the limited number of their members, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are not in a position to establish branch centres in all the places where there is great need and scope for spreading the message of Holy Trio. In many of these places this need can be met only by non-affiliated centres. As a matter of fact, the local devotees of many of these places have rallied together and established non-affiliated centres which are doing commendable work in spreading the message and in serving the community in several ways.

This does not, however, mean that non-affiliated centres have only a stop-gap function. The truth is, non-affiliated centres have great importance in themselves. One of the main intrinsic functions of these centres is to counter-balance monastic life. If a spiritual ideal or message or path is monopolized by monks, if spiritual power gets concentrated only in monasteries, that movement will show imbalance and will soon become weak and unstable. This is what the history of Buddhism in India has taught. Swami Vivekananda has pointed out that one of the drawbacks of early Buddhism in India was it tried to make everyone a monk or nun. Monks protect the purity and power of a message and provide the forward thrust to a movement, but it is the laity that provides the support and base. As the Ramakrishna Movement spreads and expands, the laity will be called upon to play greater and greater roles. The non-affiliated centres, most of which are managed by lay devotees, have thus an important part to play in the sustained progress of Ramakrishna Movement.

Work Done by Non-Affiliated Centres

Ātmano mokṣārtham jagad hitāya ca, 'For one's own salvation and for the welfare of the world' — this motto given to Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission by Swamiji is meant not only for the monks but also for the lay devotees of the Movement. In fact it is inspired by this ideal and also by the ideal of *śiva-jñāne jīva seva*, 'service to man as service to God', that most of the non-affiliated centers have been started by lay devotees. It is therefore only natural that these centres also undertake various service activities on the same lines as Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Some of the main activities of non-affiliated centers are briefly mentioned below:

1. Most of the centres have a temple or a separate shrine and prayer hall in which Sri Ramakrishna is worshipped as the main Deity along with Holy Mother and Swamiji. In many of the centres there is regular arrangement for the ritualistic worship of Sri Ramakrishna. Almost all the centres conduct *ārati* and bhajan at dusk. Many centres conduct *Rāmnām sankīrtan* on Ekadaśi days. Almost all the centres celebrate the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji on a large scale.
2. Almost all the non-affiliated centres conduct readings, classes and discourses on the scriptures and Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, either on a daily basis or at least once or twice every week. Most of these centres have libraries and bookstalls or sales sections selling books etc. They invite swamis of Ramakrishna Order to give discourses at their centres. In many of these centres a separate room is set apart for the use of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order.
3. Many of these centres have charitable dispensaries, for allopathic or homeopathic treatment. A few centres run mobile dispensaries which visit surrounding villages once or more every week. They also conduct eye-camps, dental camps, etc.
4. Some of the centres manage schools (mostly at the primary level) and hostels for boys and girls. Many centres conduct coaching classes and non-formal schools for destitute children. Vocational training, handicrafts training, value education, etc. are also given by many centres.

5. During calamities like cyclones, earth quakes, etc. most of these centres conduct relief operations either independently or in collaboration with the relief department of Ramakrishna Mission. Even when there are no natural calamities, many centres distribute food, clothing, etc. to destitute people.

Bhava Prachar Parishads

From the above discussion it is seen that in their ideology, types of service activities and mode of operation the non-affiliated centres closely follow the branch centres of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. In the Catholic Church such unaffiliated centres would have been treated as belonging to the Third Order (the First Order being for monks and the Second Order for nuns).

At any rate, the idea of bringing the non-affiliated centres closer to Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and thereby harmonizing the common spiritual, idealogical and social stream known as Ramakrishna Movement (*Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-bhāvāndolan*) had been floating in the minds of many senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Finally at the close of the Second General Convention of Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1980, the decision was taken by Belur Math authorities that Bhava Prachar Parishads, under the overall guidance of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, be formed in all the States to coordinate the work of non-affiliated centres.

Accordingly, an apex coordinating body known as Bhava Prachar Committee was formed with the General Secretary as the ex officio chairman, some senior monks as members and a senior monk as the convenor. Under the overall guidance of this apex body, coordinating bodies known as Bhava Prachar Parishads were formed. The number of Parishads formed depended upon the number of non-affiliated centers of the area. Since the number of individual centres in West Bengal is very large, West Bengal has been divided into 10 zones, each zone having one Parishad. Outside West Bengal, most of the States have one Bhava Prachar Parishad each. In a few states where individual centres are very few, a single Parishad covers three or four states. The number of Parishads in each State and the number of non-affiliated centres under them are indicated in a tabular form in the following page. (It may be noted here that Bhava Prachar Parishads have not so far been formed in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala.)

Details of the Parishads
(as on 30 June 2006)

Name of the Parishad (District wise)	No. of Parishads	No. of Ashramas under each Parishad
Andhra pradesh	1	96
Bihar & Jharkhand	1	20
Gujarat	1	9
Madhya Pradesh	1	15
Maharashtra	1	22
Orissa	1	18
Rajasthan	1	7
Tripura	1	40
Uttaranchal Rajya	1	4
Uttar Pashchimanchal (Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir)	1	6
Uttar Purvanchal (Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland & Manipur)	1	52
Uttar Pradesh	1	11
West Bengal—Bardhaman, Bankura, Purulia	1	53
West Bengal—Hoogly	1	68
West Bengal—Howrah	1	27
West Bengal—Kolkata Metro	1	22
West Bengal—Madhya Banga	1	49
West Bengal—Medinipur (East & West)	1	46
West Bengal—North 24 Paraganas	1	52
West Bengal—South 24 Paraganas	1	22
West Bengal—Sunderban	1	24
West Bengal—Uttaranchal	1	38
Total	22 Parishads	701 Member Ashramas

Each Parishad is formed by two representatives from each member Ashrama. If there are 10 member Ashramas under a Parishad, the Parishad will consist of 20 members. Each Parishad has a President and one or more Vice Presidents. They are monks nominated by the General Secretary of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Apart from them, the business transactions of the Parishad are managed by a Convenor who serves as the Secretary of the Parishads. The Convenor is assisted by one or two Joint-Convenors. The Convenor and Joint-Convenors are elected for a term of two years by the members of each Parishad. The working of each Parishad is governed by a Constitution approved by the apex Bhava Prachar Committee at the Headquarters of Ramakrishna Math.

To become a member of a Bhava Prachar Parishad each non-affiliated centre must follow the ten-point guidelines formulated by the apex Bhava Prachar Committee. These guidelines are given below.

Ten-point Guidelines

To be eligible to be a member of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishad, a non-affiliated or private centre will have to abide by the following rules:

1. The private centre should be registered as a Religious Trust and/or under the Societies Registration Act and must follow the spiritual and ethical ideals and principles of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and conduct their activities along the lines of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.
2. The private centre should have a close rapport with, and a loyal attitude towards, the Math and Mission.
3. The members of the management committee of the private centre (by whatever name that committee be called) should have no connection whatsoever with politics or political parties. The members should also have no connection whatsoever with groups and organizations that are not approved by the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.
4. No swami who has left the Ramakrishna Order for whatever reason (except purely medical) should be allowed to stay in or be associated with the private centre.

5. The private centre should maintain proper records and books of its finances and accounts which should be audited annually by Chartered Accountants.
6. The private centre, besides its other activities, must render some social service, curative and/or preventive, among the poor of the immediate neighbourhood.
7. The private centre should take up some welfare work among the rural Harijans and/or Girijans and/or other backward communities.
8. The private centre should pay attention to the youth of the locality. Weekly or fortnightly study circles, annual competition in essay-writing, recitation, music, elocution, etc. may be organized. Grown-up boys and girls should have separate study circles. Swami Vivekananda's birthday, i.e. 12th January, declared as the National Youth Day by the Government of India, should be observed by every centre.
9. Besides holding classes on the scriptures, the centre should arrange for sale of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature for propagation of the inspiring message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement.
10. Whenever occasion arises, the private centre should render relief services to people suffering from calamities. It may be done independently or under the guidance of the Math and the Mission.

The centres under a Parishad should jointly hold an annual celebration. The prominent centres can take up the responsibility of organizing the annual celebration by rotation. Besides the traditional puja, *āratrikam*, prasad distribution and religious discourses, one day may be devoted exclusively to the cause of the youth and children. Competitions in recitation, elocution, music, etc., held in different centres may have their culmination here. One morning, a procession of devotees and boys and girls of local schools and colleges may be led through the streets of the town/village where the celebration will be held. It should usually be followed by a short public meeting.

Functions of Bhava Prachar Parishads

Bhava Prachar Parishads have three main functions. In the first place, they form the connecting link between the Headquarters of Ramakrishna Math

and Ramakrishna Mission on the one hand and the individual non-affiliated centers on the other hand. They pass on to the local centres instructions and suggestions received from the Headquarters. The Parishads also give to member Ashramas a sense of identity with the main stream of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Secondly, Bhava Prachar Parishads keep a watch on the working of the non-affiliated centres, and see whether they operate within the framework of ten-point guidelines. It should be pointed out here that each non-affiliated centre is an independent and autonomous organization, and Bhava Prachar Parishads have no administrative control over it. As far as the member Ashramas are concerned, the role of a Bhava Prachar Parishad is only as an observer and guide.

The third and most important function of Bhava Prachar Parishad is to coordinate the functions of individual centres and to provide a forum for mutual exchange of views and consultation among the member centers. This coordination and exchange of views is done through the Parishad meetings.

In these meetings, which are called by the Convenor/Secretary of the Parishad, two representatives of every member Ashrama are expected to be present. The President and Vice President of the Parishad, who are monks of Ramakrishna Order, also participate in these meetings. The proceedings of these meetings are communicated to the Convenor of Bhava Prachar Committee at the Headquarters.

Bhakta Sammelans

A Bhakta Sammelan is a Devotees' Convention. It is generally organized by lay devotees, although occasionally a branch centre of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission may also organize it. A Bhakta Sammelan is a get-together of devotees from all over the State. The main aim of this get-together is to express their solidarity with the Holy Trio, their message and institutions. It also enables the devotees to exchange views with one another and benefit from the spiritual discourses, bhajans, etc. arranged on the occasion. It is a joyful occasion when all the participants feel happy, feel spiritual kinship, and also feel spiritually uplifted.

Bhakta Sammelans should not be confused with retreats. A retreat is meant for a small number of sincere aspirants, and its main purpose is to intensify one's spiritual life. The idea of retreats originated with the sixteenth-century Catholic saint Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Order. Since the Jesuits engage themselves in all kinds of secular activities, Loyola decreed that Jesuit priests must undergo intense spiritual practice for one month every year in a secluded place. This temporary withdrawal from secular life for intensification of inner life was called 'Retréat'. It was originally intended for monks, but was later extended to lay devotees also. In the Ramakrishna Math circles retreats are conducted primarily for lay devotees.

Growing Importance

The above discussion makes it clear that right from the beginning of the Ramakrishna Movement, there has been a close rapport between the householder devotees and monks, and that non-affiliated centers have played an important role in authenticating and making available the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji to common people, especially the poor and neglected sections of society in villages. Swami Vivekananda never wanted to flood the country with monks. On the contrary, he wanted that there should be a healthy balance between lay devotees and monks — numerically and functionally. Sri Ramakrishna too during his lifetime did not allow his householder disciples, even the great Nag Mahashay, to renounce the world. On the contrary, he encouraged them to discharge the duties of life in a detached way by practising self-surrender to God. And he assured them that the householders too can attain mukti by the grace of God.

We are now living in a rapidly changing world in which individual life, family life and social life and values are undergoing radical changes. The present indications are that the importance of lay devotees and the role of non-affiliated centres in the expansion of Ramakrishna Movement will grow all the more in the coming decades.

Ramakrishna Movement
ITS INFLUENCE ON INDIA AND THE WORLD

R. K. DAS GUPTA

LET US FIRST ASK the question, when did the Ramakrishna Movement begin and who inaugurated it? I think the circumstances of the Movement's origin and a clear idea of the spirit behind it is important for an understanding of the nature and the influence of its work on India and the world. The Movement began more than a decade before the formal incorporation of the Ramakrishna Mission Association on 1 May 1897 at the residence of Balaram Basu. Let us think of the day when Sri Ramakrishna wrote on a piece of paper: *Narendra śikkhā dibe*, 'Narendra will teach'. Mahendranath, who reports it, does not mention the day. Obviously it was one of the days Sri Ramakrishna spent at the Cossipore house. When we read *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita* closely to see the train of Ramakrishna's thinking, we discover that he contemplated a spiritual movement in India and abroad and had Vivekananda in his mind as the leader of that movement. When on 22 April 1886 Ramakrishna told Hirananda about Naren: *Jeno khap-khola talowar niye berochhe*, 'as if he is moving about with an unsheathed sword', or when he said on 15 July 1885: *Paddo madhye narendra sahasradal*, 'amongst lotuses Narendra is a thousand-petalled one', Sri Ramakrishna meant to stress Narendra's capacity for leadership. Similarly, Paramahamsa (Ramakrishna) said many other things to declare his intention to make Narendra the leader of a great movement. It was again at the Cossipore house that Ramakrishna asked Narendra not to care for his own salvation, and that service to man was a greater ideal than samādhi. He also stressed the need for *vidyār āmi* (the active

ego of the learned teacher), which he said even a sannyāsi like Shankaracarya had.

When the disciples of Ramakrishna began their work at the Baranagore Math in May 1887, Vivekananda naturally became their leader. And Vivekananda remembered all this when he founded the Ramakrishna Mission ten years later. In the resolution forming the Mission, Vivekananda called Sri Ramakrishna 'the inaugurator of the Movement for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions.' In the Debottar Deed and Declaration of Trust as executed and signed by Vivekananda on 30 January 1901, and registered on 6 February 1901 at the Sub-Registry Office at Howrah, 'the religion of Ramakrishna' is mentioned as the religion to be preached by the Mission. The idea of 'the religion of Sri Ramakrishna' is stressed in the second of the two paragraphs on the objects of the Math as stated in the Rules and Regulations of the Ramakrishna Math as it was registered with the Registrar of Associations in 1970. Here the religion of Ramakrishna is explained as the 'universal principles taught by Sri Ramakrishna and exemplified in his life.'

When was this Movement first mentioned as a Ramakrishna Movement after Vivekananda had called it a Movement inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna? I think it was only after something striking had been achieved by the Movement that it was so mentioned by those who were acquainted with its work. In her 'Reminiscences', S. E. Waldo speaks of a 'fit beginning that has grown into such proportions.'[1] By this 'fit beginning' Waldo means the work of Vivekananda in Brooklyn in 1894. And the work was Vivekananda's teaching that all religions are true. Still we do not have the expression 'Ramakrishna Movement'. In India the disciples of Ramakrishna, monastic or lay, did not use the expression because they knew that they were really involved in the Ramakrishna Movement. This great Movement is mentioned as the Ramakrishna Movement in the West.

Now the question is, why is the Movement called the Ramakrishna Movement and not the Vedanta Movement, when the message of the Movement is a Vedantic message? The reason is given in the Memorandum of the Association where it is stated that the object of the Mission is 'to promote the study of the Vedanta and its principles as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and practically illustrated by his own life.' This must be understood by all who are interested in the work of the Movement. And this is sometimes not understood

by those who produce scholarly works on the subject. Professor C. T. Jackson, for an example, says in his *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (1994): 'The Ramakrishna Movement's essential message in America is the Vedanta philosophy as interpreted by the Advaita or non-dualistic school.'[2] The Ramakrishna Mission's work is the promotion of Vedanta as it was practised by Ramakrishna. And Vivekananda himself very firmly disavows the idea that Shankara's Advaita Vedanta is the only Vedanta.

How Ramakrishna-Vivekananda's Vedanta is to be carefully distinguished from Advaita Vedanta is very well stressed by Swami Satprakashananda in his paper 'The Buddha, Sri Shankaracarya, and Swami Vivekananda', included in the Proceedings of the Parliament of Religions held in Calcutta in 1963-1964 to mark the birth-centenary of Swami Vivekananda. In section 30 of this paper Swami Satprakashananda says, by way of pointing out the distinction between the Neo-Vedanta of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and the classical Vedanta of Shankara: 'Both the sections hold that a person can realize Brahman and attain liberation while dwelling in the body and live in the world as a free soul until the term of life due to karma expires. But Shankara and his school have emphasized the ideal of liberation — the cessation of all suffering and attainment of supreme bliss in complete absorption in Brahman; whereas Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples have emphasised the ideal of living in the world as a free soul for the well-being of humanity.'[3] Let us remember Vivekananda's memorable words on Shankara as a Vedantist in his famous address 'Vedantism': 'Shankaracharya committed the mistake in supposing that the whole of the Upaniṣads taught one thing, which was advaitism, and nothing else; and whenever a passage bearing distinctly the dvaita ideas occurred, he twisted and tortured the meaning to make it support his own theory.'[4] I am going into this question because it has an important bearing on our understanding of the achievements of the Ramakrishna Movement.

I may now speak of another name for the Ramakrishna Movement. Many now call this Movement the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. It seems Vivekananda himself disallows this renaming of the Movement. He used to say that all that he was teaching was what he had learnt from his Master. Yet, I think, it would not be improper to add his name to the name of the Movement only because it was he who conducted the Movement, organized the Mission, and himself carried his Master's message to all parts of India and many parts

of the world. There is an element of true creativity in Vivekananda's interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna's ideals and it would be legitimate to mention the Movement as the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement. In his paper 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda on the Harmony of all Religions', Professor S. C. Chatterjee says: 'We find in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda a happy reconciliation of the four paths to liberation, namely, *yoga*, *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti*.' [5]

The Achievements of the Ramakrishna Movement: Its Influence on India and World

We may now try to sum up the achievements of this great Movement in the modern world. Let us keep in mind the fact that there is no religious movement in the world today which is comparable with this Movement in respect of magnitude, significance and influence. We need not measure or quantify the achievements of the Movement by drawing up a statistical table of its many centres in India and abroad, of the relief work it has done for over a century, of the schools and colleges the Ramakrishna Order maintains, of its cultural work through its publications and the lectures and seminars it has organized for a century. All these have already been discussed in the earlier articles of this section; and there is an account of all this in Swami Gambhirananda's *The History of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission*, first published in 1957, and now available in its third revised edition published in 1985. The 1085-page proceedings of the Parliament of Religions held in Calcutta in 1937 to mark the birth-centenary of Sri Ramakrishna is a document of the world's response to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. There were two international parliaments of religions to mark the hundredth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's participation in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. A volume published by the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission on the same occasion is again a document of the world's response to the ideals of the Ramakrishna Order.

What is particularly important as an account of the achievements of the Ramakrishna Movement is the present position of the Vedanta philosophy in the world. In the century between the first translation of an Upaniṣad into English, the *Īśā Upaniṣad* (published in London in 1799) translated by Sir Willam Jones (1746-1794), and Vivekananda's emergence in the West as a

modern Vedantist in 1893, there is really nothing to show that there was any profound and pervasive response to Indian thought in Europe and America. The *Oupnek'hat* (1800-1801) of Anquetil Duperron, a two-volume Latin version of Prince Dara Shukoh's Persian translation of fifty Upaniṣads made in 1657, stirred the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who said about it in his *Parerga und Paralipomena* (1851) that 'it has been the solace of my life and it will be the solace of my death.' In his magnum opus *The World as Will and Idea* (1818), Schopenhauer prophesied that 'the influence of the Sanskrit literature will penetrate not less deeply than did the revival of Greek in the fifteenth century.'[6] Swami Vivekananda happily refers to this prophecy in one of his interviews.[7] Actually Schopenhauer's profound appreciation of the Upaniṣads created in Vivekananda the hope for what he called 'a slow and never-ceasing permeation of Indian thought' in Western philosophy.[8] Later Max Müller's English translation of the principal Upaniṣads appeared in two volumes in the *Sacred Books of the East* series in 1879 and 1884. In his introduction, Max Müller put the Upaniṣads in the idealistic tradition of European philosophy from Plato to Kant. But in spite of this, the Vedanta philosophy had no presence even at Max Müller's own University of Oxford. When F. H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* appeared in 1893, the Upaniṣadic scholars missed a bare mention of Vedanta idealism in the work. In his lectures delivered at Cambridge and published as *India, What Can It Teach Us* (1882), Max Müller said: 'If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life... I should point to India.'[9] And the work of Indologists from Sir William Jones to Horace Hayman Wilson did a great deal to bring Indian wisdom to the notice of the West. Still there was no serious attempt to weave Indian thought into the fabric of Western philosophy. In Germany there were philosophers other than Schopenhauer who spoke of Indian philosophy with respect and sometimes even with enthusiasm. Still the general impression of the Western academic philosopher was under the influence of Hegel who said that Vedantic Advaita was 'annihilation and blunting away of self-consciousness'.[10]

Let us begin to realize that Vivekananda's work gave a great impetus to Vedantic studies in the West. The Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gita* began to be read not only by scholars of universities, but also by the educated classes.

The words of William James (1842-1910), the distinguished American philosopher, that 'the paragon of all monistic systems is the Vedanta philosophy of Hindustan and the paragon of Vedantic missionaries is the late Swami Vivekananda who visited our land some years ago' made a great impression on the philosophic mind of the Anglo-Saxon world.[11] James added that 'We all have some ear for this monistic music.' James's Gifford Lectures, published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which has been looked upon as a classic of religious literature since its publication in 1902, contains long quotations from Swami Vivekananda's 'Practical Vedanta' and 'The Real and the Apparent Man', and obviously this aroused great interest in the works of Swami Vivekananda.[12]

We can see how Vedanta influenced the Western mind since then from two collections of essays, *Vedanta for Modern Man* (1945) and *Vedanta for the Western World*, both edited by Christopher Isherwood. In the first of these two works there is an essay on the Ramakrishna Order which shows its standing in the West half a century ago. This essay says: 'Side by side with the Ramakrishna Order, Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission, an institute which has grown steadily throughout the five decades of this [20th] century. There are now hundred-odd centres in different parts of India, devoted either to the contemplative life, or to social service and educational work, or a combination of both.' This was said more than a half a century ago. The work of the Mission, both on the spiritual and material plane, has doubled in dimension and depth in the last half a century, which we have already seen in the preceding articles.

The Ramakrishna Mission is now really a Movement, a Movement of people's minds towards a spiritual and moral goal. And yet it has none of the noise and excitement we usually associate with a movement. It is never involved in any controversy; it has never required to wield any weapons of offence or defence. It has about it the quietness and gentleness of the saint who set it in motion and bestowed on it his blessings. And what is particularly striking is that the monks, nuns, brahmachārins, and brahmachārinis of the Order who form the nucleus of the Movement silently take care of countless men and women throughout the world striving to realize the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in various ways. The Movement has neither a flag nor a slogan, and it has no written articles of faith to which one must owe

allegiance. There is a spontaneity and freedom about the Movement which no other movement in human history has ever shown as its chief feature.

Certainly one may ask the question, how has the Movement influenced the people of the country where it originated? It is certainly a disturbing question, a question not easy to answer. Let us look at the world today, as it has emerged out of the Second World War. India is a part of that world and it cannot possibly avoid the problems which the world faces today. And the two chief problems are (1) industrialism advancing throughout the world, and (2) the growing influence of politics on society. Both have been responsible for bringing a competitiveness in life which has naturally inflated man's ego, depriving him of his urge for a spiritual ideal. The strain of sustaining industry and the tension of politics have naturally created a desire for entertainment which has, in its train, produced a large measure of shallowness and vulgarity in social life. In a situation like this, yearning for a spiritual and moral life may not be so common. Throughout the world there is now a dearth of religious sensibility. While there is phenomenal progress in science and technology showing a very striking development of man's intellectual powers which are no less evident in economic thought and action, and in many nations' military preparations, we see very little of any earnestness for a spiritual and moral renaissance to match our great achievement on the material plane.

In our educational system also there is very little scope for the development of our inner life. And reports of human activity, of groups and individuals, in our newspapers are not heartening for those who care for the great values of life preached by our sages throughout our history. We now measure our achievements in human civilization in terms of our success in political and economic affairs. We have no notion of an affair of the soul, of what we can attain in silence and solitude. There are even people who think that for the modern man religion is useless if not a dangerous luxury. And there are those who do not believe in the possibility of a pure life, and to establish their views they are now subjecting the great saints of the past to a Freudian analysis, and ere long their great words which have given us our ideas of a spiritual culture may be a subject of Derridean deconstruction. I fear we have become too intellectual, too sophisticated even to believe in any form of idealism. Our intellectual powers seem to have frozen our heart. When the Western world was frightened about the future of the world during and after the Second

World War, it was fear of extinction which made it think of the human future. Fear cannot save us from the peril which we have brought upon ourselves. Fear can only beget fear and bring about us a darkness which we would be incapable of dispelling. What can bind humanity together for salvation is neither fear nor law, not even international law enforced by an international body. What can bind us all, nations and individuals, is love, preached by all our religions.

The German philosopher Karl Jaspers says in his *The Future of Makind* that 'at sublime moments, man may have an overpowering experience of the eternal present; in the act of sacrifice, in the unquestioning, all-illuminating power of love, in contemplative insight, in the confidence of reason.'[13] Sri Ramakrishna and his disciple Swami Vivekananda ask for this 'all-illuminating power of love' as the only remedy for all that seem to thwart us in life. Vivekananda too had his anxiety about the human future. But he had also great hope. In his address 'The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion' delivered in the Universal Church, Pasadena, California, on 28 January 1900, he summed up his Master's idea of the harmony of religions while saying: 'We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutations to all prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future.'[14] Let us see that no other prophet of the world in man's spiritual history has thus summoned mankind to its ideals in the name of all humanity, not invoking any particular prophet or any particular faith. Vivekananda imbibed this spirit of universality from his Master who was above sects and dogmas. And at this hour of human crisis, when in the abounding darkness around us we seem to lose our hope for a great human future, we see a ray of light coming from this sense of an 'infinite future'.

When Bertrand Russell wrote his small book *Has Man a Future?* in 1961, he concerned himself mostly with the evil of war and contemplated an International Government to prevent its recurrence. But at the end he too makes an appeal to humanity: 'I see in my mind's eye, a world of glory and joy, a world where minds expand, where hope remains undimmed, and what is noble is no longer condemned as treachery to this or that paltry air.'[15] Since Russell is a confirmed atheist, he does not bring in any idea of a Transcendental Reality in

his prophecy about the human future. When Vivekananda speaks of man's 'infinite future' he certainly sees transcendence in infinitude. And here we see what is characteristic of the Ramakrishna Movement. It calls man back to his religion. And any religion is Ramakrishna's religion.

I rest my faith on the Ramakrishna Movement in my hope for mankind because of its faith in the infinitude or transcendence of humanity's most cherished ideals. It is a Movement which is today 108 years old. And over these years it has grown from more to more and has not known a set back even for a short while. It has touched more hearts in the world than any other movement I know. It has never made any tall claims for itself. It has never come into conflict with any other movement. And there are witnesses to the growing influence of the Movement who are leaders of thought in the modern world. I think at the present juncture of the Movement's entry into the 21st century, it is legitimate to listen to the cheering words of these representative thinkers of the modern world.

I may first speak of Professor Arnold Toynbee, the distinguished historian who brought the entire human history into the scope of his historical studies and research. Toynbee says about Sri Ramakrishna that 'his religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps not been attained by any other religious genius in India or elsewhere.'[16] I am not quoting Romain Rolland because his work on Sri Ramakrishna published in 1930 is now a popular classic. Pitirim A. Sorokin, the great sociologist, has said something which is particularly important for our understanding of the nature of the Ramakrishna Movement as a spiritual force in the modern world: 'A successful growth of Sri Ramakrishna and of the Vedanta Movement in the West is one of many symptoms of two basic processes which are going on at the present time in the human universe. One of these changes is the epochal shift of the creative centre of mankind from Europe to the larger area of the Pacific-Atlantic, while the other consists in a double process of continued decay of sensate culture and society and of the emergence and growth of the new — Integral or Ideational — socio-cultural order.'[17] Sorokin is here speaking of the growth of spiritual idealism which is rooted in Vedanta as interpreted by Sri Ramakrishna. We may now turn to Gerald Heard who says in his paper 'Vedanta and Western History' that 'the appearance of Vedanta in the West as a living religion, and not as an academic study, is inevitable.'[18] Heard here

speaks of Vedanta as it was presented to the West by Swami Vivekananda, who learnt the essence of the philosophy from his Master, Sri Ramakrishna. Gerald Heard has written yet another paper on the subject where he says: 'The religion of mankind will be syncretistic. Some Shankara of our age or of the oncoming generations will rear a philosophy and deduce a practice which drawing upon the past will give a contemporary answer and conduct to the present, for its needs and its activities.'[19] Obviously Heard has in mind a new Shankara proclaiming a new Vedanta. Writing more than fifty years ago, Heard did not know that the modern world has accepted Vivekananda, the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, as a new Shankara preaching a new Vedanta. Christopher Isherwood is one of those who understood Sri Ramakrishna as 'Vedanta's greatest human exemplar.'[20] And Vivekananda knew his Master Sri Ramakrishna as the living embodiment of the Vedantic ideal. It is the ideal which the Ramakrishna Order has been preaching for the last hundred years and more through a Movement which is now known as the Ramakrishna Movement. When there is a re-flowering of the human spirit in this twenty-first century in some universal spiritual renaissance, it will be seen as the fulfilment of the great ideal to which the Ramakrishna Order dedicated itself 108 years ago with Vivekananda as leader and Sri Ramakrishna as the guiding spirit.

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Ramakrishna Mission and the Total Uplift of Humanity

AN OVERVIEW OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION'S CONTRIBUTIONS

SATCHIDANANDA DHAR

SRI RAMAKRISHNA is fairly well known all over the modern world for his unique message of harmony and the divinity of man. As a man of God, his spiritual experiences are nowadays shared by followers of all rational faiths. His humane sympathy, compassion, and love for all beings are admired and practised by many. He represents whatever is good and best in human life. His life is a unique model, following which everybody can attain his or her highest aspiration. His life is a synthesis of all contradictions, and his message is one which aims at the total uplift of all humanity. Ramakrishna is a universal personality, a model of a perfect man.

Sri Ramakrishna's Message Being Translated into Action by the Ramakrishna Mission

Sri Ramakrishna had a 'mission', a message to this world for which he was born. His mission was to awaken the divinity in man and to remove the obstacles for the manifestation of this divinity. He had a great scheme to uplift all humanity from the miserable state of animality to humanity, and from humanity to divinity. Though his main aim was the spiritual uplift of mankind, he never excluded secular progress in all its aspects. To his mission nothing

was secular. He spiritualized the so-called secular activities of man. Sri Ramakrishna's mission was to make all men conscious of the goal of their life, which he said was only to realize God, to realize the Self.

The Two Extraordinary Teachers

Ramakrishna desired that his mission of uplifting humanity be propagated in its true spirit by two chosen persons — the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. Ramakrishna gave special training to both of them so that they might 'teach the world' to realize his ideal of 'realization of the Self and service to the world' through the spirit of 'renunciation and service'. Besides these two, Sri Ramakrishna also trained his other sannyāsi and a few lay disciples to live up to his ideals and propagate the same as far as practicable.

Though all his spiritual *sādhanās* aimed at the realization of God, or Brahman, Sri Ramakrishna was ever conscious of the sufferings and miseries of the world and was ever eager to remove them. Before his departure from this world, Sri Ramakrishna placed the burden of his mission upon the Holy Mother and Naren (Swami Vivekananda). Thus, both Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda were the main caretakers of the mission of Sri Ramarkrishna — the uplift of humanity spiritually and materially.

The Origin of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission

It is commonly known that the Ramakrishna Mission was established by Swami Vivekananda on 1 May 1897, after his return from his spiritual conquest of the West. But Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi had been deeply concerned about setting up such a Sangha (Mission) to preserve and preach the ideals of Ramakrishna even before Narendranath or any of the other disciples of Ramakrishna could conceive of it. When the sannyāsi disciples of Ramakrishna were wandering from place to place on pilgrimage, practising austerities, Holy Mother was silently and earnestly praying for the origin of the Sangha. Later she said, 'It is due to my prayer to Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] that Naren later on established the Math, Mission, and similar institutions.' After the passing away of Swami Vivekananda (1902), Holy Mother was the only guide to

direct the Sangha on the path of Sri Ramakrishna's ideal. She was the final authority at times of confusion and doubts. She was the 'high court' of the Mission.

The Origin of the Sarada Math and Mission

Swami Vivekananda, and later on the Ramakrishna Mission itself, did a great service to humanity by giving inspiration and necessary help to establish a separate Sangha (Math and Mission) for women in 1954, with the same ideal, in the name of Sri Sarada Devi, who was, according to Sri Ramakrishna, the perfection of womanhood. Half of the human population consists of women. Women also need the same opportunities for the attainment of perfection as men. It was in the scheme and plan of Sri Ramakrishna himself to set before the world a perfect model of motherhood for the benefit of both men and women. It was with this aim in view that Sri Ramakrishna brought Holy Mother to this world, accepted her as his wife, trained her as a perfect woman, and even worshipped her as his idol of *sādhanā*. As Sri Ramakrishna's life is a model for humanity to follow, so is the life of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Without the life of Holy Mother, Ramakrishna's ideals are not complete. Now the Ramakrishna Mission and Sarada Mission both together represent the ideals for the total uplift of humanity.

Worshipping God by Serving Humanity — Practical Vedanta

The different activities of the Ramakrishna Sangha (the Math and the Mission combined) aim at the total uplift of humanity without any discrimination of caste, creed, race, or nationality. By total uplift we mean the development of the body, the mind, and the soul. We mean the fulfilment of all physical, mental, and spiritual requirements. A man is not a lump of flesh alone; he has a mind and a soul also. Total upliftment means to fulfil the requirements of these three.

Sri Ramakrishna, though always absorbed in *samādhi*, was pained to see the condition of the hungry poor Santhals of Deoghar and of the poverty and famine-striken tenants of Mathurbabu's estate at Kalaighat. The Ramakrishna Mission has been carrying out the wish of Sri Ramakrishna for the last one

hundred years and more, and this spiritual organization is expected to serve humanity for hundreds of years to come in accordance with the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna. The Ramakrishna Mission is an organization which is essentially spiritual in character. It is not a so-called social service society, which renders free and benevolent help to the needy. The work done by the Ramakrishna Mission is really *sevā*, worship of humanity. It is Ramakrishna who taught Vivekananda (then Narendranath) to render service to the needy with an attitude of worship — *pūjā*. Service to the *jīva* (an individual) is worship of Shiva in the eyes of the servants of the Ramakrishna Mission.

The Ramakrishna Mission stands for the universal ideal of Vedanta. According to Advaita Vedanta, the *jīva* is Brahman: *jīva brahmaiva nāparaḥ*. Therefore, to serve a *jīva* is to serve Brahman. As Brahman is all-pervading, it is in every *jīva*. Thus, by such an identification of one's own self with Brahman, one can realize one's highest Self — the all-pervading Brahman. This realization of unity with the universe through service is called Practical Vedanta. To a monastic or a lay follower of the Ramakrishna Mission, service is accepted as a *sādhanā* for realizing the highest spiritual truth. Here lies the difference between the social service activities conducted by other organizations and the service rendered by the Ramakrishna Mission. By the grace and glory of Sri Ramakrishna, almost all religious organizations, during the past hundred years, have accepted this philosophy of service as one of their *sādhanās*.

The Aim of the Mission's Activities

On the day of the foundation of the Mission (1 May 1897), and its subsequent meeting on 5 May 1897, the details of the Mission's aims and objectives were drawn up as follows:

> The aim of the Sangha is to preach those truths which Sri Ramakrishna has, *for the good of humanity*, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives *for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement.*
>
> The methods of actions are:
>
> - To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or science as are *conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses.*

- *To provide and encourage arts and industries*: and
- To introduce and *spread among the people in general Vedanta and other religious ideals* in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.
- Its work in the foreign department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India *to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries.*
- *The aims and ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian*, it shall have no connection with politics.

To understand the qualitative aspect of the humane service done by the Ramakrishna Sangha, we may specially note the italicized words from the previous quotation: 'It is for the good of humanity', 'for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement', 'conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses', 'to provide and encourage arts and industries', 'to spread among the people general Vedantic and other religious ideas', 'to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries', and 'the ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian'.

The last century (1897-1997) in the history of the Ramakrishna Mission may be termed as the period of formation and development. But due to the glory and grace of Sri Ramakrishna, the Mission has been progressing steadily and speedily on the path of its ideal. Before concluding, a short perusal of the different activities of the Mission during the past century, which was discussed in several of the preceding articles of this section, will reveal its growth and glory.

A Brief Statement of the Activities and Achievements of the Ramakrishna Sangha

Both the Ramakrishna Math and the Mission aim at the realization of the same goal — one's own liberation and service to the world. 'Though both the organizations take up charitable and philanthropic activities, the former lays emphasis on religion and preaching, while the latter is wedded mainly to welfare services undertaken with a spiritual outlook' (*Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, March 1997). Judged in the light of spirit and quality, the services

rendered by the Mission are unique. And judged by its variety and volume, the activities of the Mission are more than those of other voluntary religious organizations in India. The scheme of the Mission is for a 'total uplift' (*sarvodaya*) of humanity.

Medical Services

Medical services rendered by the Mission are for all — without any distinction of caste, creed, or nationality. At present (2003-04) the Math and the Mission run 15 hospitals with 2032 beds, 120 out-patient dispensaries, and 46 mobile units, most of which serve in rural and tribal areas. The Mission also organizes temporary medical camps for treatment of different diseases.

As a part of its medical education programmes, it has Nurses' Training Schools attached to 5 of its hospitals, which trained 402 nurses in 2003-04. Recently, in October 2005, a College of Nursing was added to its pre-eminent medical centre in Calcutta — Seva Pratishthan. This centre conducts also research in different branches of medical science. Presently the Mission has two old-age homes for men and one for women, two centres for the treatment of tuberculosis, and some centres for maternity and child welfare. Besides medical relief, patients receive sympathetic and devoted treatment from the workers, which is why medical centres of the Mission are so popular.

Educational Work

According to Swami Vivekananda, 'education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' With this ideal in view, the Math and the Mission run different types of educational institutions. Students of these Mission schools and colleges have proved their distinction both by their brilliant results and ideal conduct. At present (2003-04) the Mission runs 6 degree colleges, 1 Sanskrit college, 5 teachers' training colleges, 5 junior basic training institutes, 21 higher secondary schools, 38 secondary schools, 3 Sanskrit schools, 361 schools of different grades, 4 polytechnics, 6 junior technical and industrial schools, 119 hostels and students' homes, 6 orphanages, 3 institutes of agriculture, 2 schools of languages, 2 computer training centres, 2 centres for the disabled (which include one Blind Boy's Academy), 4 rural development training institutes, and 270 non-formal education centres. This year (2005) a significant step was taken in the Mission's educational field by establishing a deemed-

university. Swamiji had prophecied that Belur Math would become a university. Through this University, a concrete step has been taken to actualize Swamiji's vision.

Private and non-affiliated centres also run similar institutions with the same ideal. Mission schools and colleges have been regarded as models of educational institutions in India. Even government employees of India and foreign countries are sent to some of the Mission institutions for special training.

Activities for the Youth, and their Participation

Besides imparting formal school and college education, the Mission, through many of its centres, provides recreational, cultural, and spiritual training for the development of the all-round personality and character of the youths. Response to such training, both from the guardians and from the students, is highly encouraging. Such programmes have been inspiring youths to become good citizens dedicated to the selfless service of the country.

It is also encouraging to note that in the name of, and with the intention to follow, the ideals of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, both boys and girls zealously respond to the conferences, seminars, and cultural programmes conducted by the Mission, and also to its social service activities such as blood donation, free coaching to needy students, etc. We are optimistic that the new generation will be free from all types corruption and meanness, and will uphold the glory of human values. The birthday of Swami Vivekananda, 12th January, has been declared 'National Youth Day'. On this day the ideals of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are well remembered and various socio-cultural programmes are conducted.

Service for Women's Welfare

Some special services are provided exclusively for women through different girls' schools, hostels, hospitals, nursing homes, rural development programmes, etc. These programmes have been successful even in remote rural and tribal areas, educating women for their self-development.

Service for Rural and Tribal Welfare

This programme of the Mission deserves special mention because Swami Vivekananda, with his far-sightedness, realized hundred years ago that the true

spirit and culture of India reside in the masses living in the rural and remote hill areas. This is why, even before the founding of the Mission, Swamiji encouraged Swami Akhandananda to render service to poor villagers. Attempt to awaken the self by first rendering physical help is the aim of the Mission's activities among the masses. The record of 108 years' service to the masses by the Mission amply proves its success.

This project is wide-ranging and reaches the grassroot levels of rural India. Activities for rural development consist of: health awareness, agricultural development, encouragement of cottage industries and cooperation, general education for self-reliance, medical treatment, preservation of culture and tradition, preservation of the environment and forest resources, adult education through non-formal schools, improvement of cattle, providing low-cost houses, etc.

Many State and Central Government organizations for rural development have been seeking the guidance and assistance of the Mission centres for implementation of their rural development projects. The Mission started many such projects even before India became independent.

Relief and Rehabilitation Work

The Ramakrishna Mission is well known for its relief work of various kinds. This was so important to Swamiji that he even considered selling the land meant for establishing Belur Math in order to raise money. Relief work is carried out by the Mission during natural calamities like cyclones, floods, drought, earthquakes, fire, riots, outbreak of epidemic diseases, and so forth. In many cases, after temporary relief, rehabilitation and other follow-up works are also taken up.

Ever since its inception, both the Government and the public have come to rely on, and earnestly expect, the humanitarian services from the Ramakrishna Mission. The ideal of service of the Mission is now accepted by people all over the world. But the Mission, being a spiritual organization, is naturally unwilling to publicize its service.

Mass Contact through Spiritual and Cultural Work

Through the years the Mission has maintained contact with the masses through its various branches spread all over the country. People become closely

related with the Mission when they are involved in different projects of service, either as workers or as beneficiaries. During the birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda, and on other religious and festive occasions, people become acquainted with liberal ideas of religion, culture, and human values. Different publications and periodicals of the Mission also help in this project. Moreover, special projects of mass contact, like *Jnana Vahini* and *Vivekananda Murasu* launched recently, also have proved to be a great success.

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta Literature — a Healthy Tonic for the World

Publication of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature, including journals and reports, and also the seminars and lectures conducted by the Ramakrishna Order, have contributed a great deal towards the development of noble ideas and better understanding of philosophical and spiritual truths.

Bhakta-Sammelans

Interest in spiritual practices and self-upliftment have been remarkable among the followers of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, both in India and abroad. Not only the initiated devotees of the Ramakrishna Math but also the followers of other religions and faiths eagerly participate in such congregations with a liberal and devotional attitude. Such spiritual congregations, mostly under the guidance of the monks of the Mission, have been helping to create a deeper understanding of the unity of human souls.

Preaching Harmony of Religious Faiths

One of the greatest achievements of the Ramakrishna Sangha during a century of its existence is the preaching of the harmony of religious faiths. The message of Sri Ramakrishna on the harmony of religious faiths pronounced by Swami Vivekananda in Chicago has now been accepted by almost all the faiths of the world. Now few religious missionaries dare to speak ill of other faiths. Rather, previous approaches to establish the superiority of one's own religion are nowadays directed instead towards establishing the spirit of harmony, tolerance, and acceptance.

The Promotion of Vedantic Approach to Religion

Sri Ramakrishna realized Vedanta in a way by which each and every religion could be understood in its true nature. Swami Vivekananda did not preach a creed of Sri Ramakrishna, but he preached 'the Vedanta realized in the life and acts of Sri Ramakrishna'. The Ramakrishna Mission's religious activities are guided on this line. Most of the Mission centres outside India are known as 'Vedanta Societies'. During the last century these centres have been very successful in presenting the idea of the Universal Religion; and Vedantic ideas have been working in the minds of world thinkers, philosophers, and humanists. This is proved by the increasing demand from many quarters for the establishment of Vedanta centres and for preachers from the Ramakrishna Mission. All this was briefly discussed in the 'Historical Perspectives' section of this volume.

The Ramakrishna Mission today may claim to be the representative of Indian cultural and universal thought to the outside world *to bring about a closer relationship and better understanding between India and foreign countries.* This was contemplated by Swami Vivekananda more than hundred years ago.

Thus all these spiritual and socio-economic services of the Mission must be judged by the worshipful spirit in which they are rendered. It is a new philosophy for the world, derived from the divine lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. This spirit of *sevā* will remove many social and political evils from society. Swami Akhandananda was the first translator of this ideal of *sevā dharma* into action. He was the first model of service as done by the Ramakrishna Mission.

Number of Centres

Presently (in 2006) the Ramakrishna Order has 163 centres in all — 122 in India and 41 abroad. Of these, 72 are Mission centres, 64 Math centres, and 27 combined Math and Mission centres. There are 46 sub-centres attached to some of these main branch centres, where monastic members reside more or less permanently. There are at present 1542 monastic members (including pre-probationers) in the Ramakrishna Order.

It is gratifying to note that there are today 701 centres all over India, which, though not directly affiliated or controlled by the Mission Headquarters,

carry out projects similar to those of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission under its *Bhava Prachar Parishads*. They are run by the lay devotees and admirers of the ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, generally under the advice and guidance of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Most of the service activities are being executed by the Mission through its *Bhava Prachar* centres spread all over the country. Even apart from such centres, there are innumerable groups working in India and abroad.

The Ramakrishna Mission, a spiritual Sangha aiming at the 'total uplift of humanity', has proved itself during the last 108 years by its noteworthy contributions to humanity at all levels. In 1997 it celebrated its centenary. Now it has stepped into the 21st century with an equally promising future. We, therefore, before concluding, offer our salutations to its universal ideal — 'for one's own liberation and for the welfare of humanity' through 'renunciation and service'.

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PART IV

Ideological Perspectives

Sri Ramakrishna pointing out to Keshab Chandra Sen
the harmony of religions — a painting commissioned in 1882

The wavy waters in the picture are symbolic of Karma; and lotus, of Bhakti; and the rising-sun, of Jnana. The encircling serpent is indicative of Yoga and the awakened Kundalini Shakti, while the swan in the picture stands for the Paramatman (Supreme Self). Therefore the idea of the picture is that by the union of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Yoga, the vision of the Paramatman is obtained.

—Swami Vivekananda

Vedanta

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT

SWAMI BHAJANANANDA

VEDANTA IS A PHILOSOPHY and way of life associated with the religion and culture of India. For more than three thousand years this philosophy has shaped the religious consciousness of the people of this subcontinent. It is a living philosophy, which permeates almost every aspect of life of the people, the rich and the poor, the high and the low.

It originated between 1000 BC and 500 BC among small groups of seekers in India as a quest for the ultimate Reality. In those days the religious life of the Indian people was centred on sacrificial rites and adoration of many gods. Soon there arose among them mystics and sages, bearing such striking names as Shvetaketu, Yājñavalkya, Pippalāda, Varuna, and others, who sought to realize the ultimate Reality through contemplation. The higher knowledge, known as *brahmavidyā*, that they attained was transmitted through the disciples who gathered around them. The records of this transmission of knowledge came to be known as the Upaniṣads.

A parallel situation existed in ancient Greece. The Greeks too worshipped many gods and followed several cults. But around 600 BC there arose thinkers like Heraclitus, Anaximander, Empedocles, and Parmenides, followed, in later centuries, by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. However, philosophical enquiry remained independent of religion in ancient Greece. The separation of the two became complete when Christianity was introduced in the fourth century AD.

Since then religion and philosophy have followed independent courses of development in the West to the present day.

The situation in India was quite different. Here philosophy and religion developed in close association with each other. Philosophy derived its dynamism from religion, and religion derived its breadth of vision from philosophy. What made the situation in India different from that in the West? In the first place, whereas Western philosophy was based on intellectual speculation, Indian philosophy was based on mystic contemplation. The Indian sages first developed techniques to discover the highest Truth. Secondly, Greek philosophers were primarily concerned with the nature of the external world, whereas Indian sages were concerned with man's existential problems. As Prof. Max Müller has stated, philosophy was recommended in India 'not for the sake of knowledge but for the highest purpose that man can strive after in this life.'[1] The fifteenth century Christian mystical and humanistic writer Giovanni Mirandolla stated, 'Philosophy seeks the truth, theology finds it, religion possesses it.' Vedanta may be said to have performed all the three acts of seeking, finding, and possessing Truth.

Vedanta is the sole surviving philosophy of the Hindu religious tradition known as Sanatana Dharma or 'Eternal Religion'. In the course of the long history of Hindu culture, several other systems of philosophy arose, but they were mostly confined to small circles of intellectuals and never became the mainstream philosophy. They were finally absorbed into the mainstream, leaving Vedanta the only living philosophy of the Eternal Religion.

If we study the histories of the major religions of the world, we will find that every one of them has reached its present state by overcoming innumerable challenges and adversities. What is unique about Hinduism is that its growth and development have taken place not by suppressing or destroying other religions and cultures but by integrating their best elements into its own body. Hegel's famous theory that the progression of human history follows the dialectical pattern of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, seems to have been worked out only in India.

What is true of Hinduism as a whole is more specifically true of Vedanta. During the early three millennia of its existence, Vedanta grew and developed by the dialectical integration of innumerable thought currents at different periods of history, and has now become a vast, complex system of thought with many

divisions and schools. It is like a river, ever flowing, ever renewing itself, originating in the limpid glaciers of the mountains, growing in volume as more and more tributaries join it. Vedanta originated in the Upaniṣads which represent the pinnacle of Indian thought. As it flowed through the centuries, diverse thought currents began to join it. The first tributary was Vaishnavism centred on the cult of Sri Krishna, which introduced the concept of the Avatar into Vedanta. Buddhism, which originated in the sixth century BC, ran parallel for nearly a thousand years until the Mādhyamika dialectic was integrated into Vedanta by Shankara in the eighth century AD.

The greatest challenge that Vedanta ever faced was in the nineteenth century when Western culture, introduced through English education, began to have its impact on Indian society. Western culture posed three challenges. The first challenge came from the humanistic aspect of the Christian religion which emphasized man's love for man and God's love for man, especially for the poor, the sick, and the neglected. Another challenge was that posed by the secular values of Western society such as freedom, equality, courage, and justice, which were quite a contrast to the mores of the caste-ridden Hindu society. The third challenge was rational thinking and science that Western thought introduced. Swami Vivekananda was the first great leader in India to meet these challenges head-on. Swamiji made a stupendous effort, single-handedly, to bring about a dialectical integration of the best elements of Western thought and culture into Indian thought and culture. Regrettably, the extent and importance of Swamiji's work in this field have not yet been properly assessed or understood.

Through the efforts of Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta emerged as a dynamic, powerful, universally valid religious philosophy with great resilience and adaptability. It is this refined, reformulated, rejuvenated, and universalized form of Vedanta that underlies the Ramakrishna-Vedanta Movement as its basic philosophy and social manifesto. To distinguish it from the traditional system of the Vedanta philosophy embedded in its original parental matrix, it used to be called 'Neo-Vedanta'. But this term is no longer in vogue because, through various processes of social and cultural diffusion, Vedanta has reached such a degree of homogeneity in the religious consciousness of modern Hindus that its contours are no longer distinguishable from traditional Vedanta.

It was this modernized form of Vedanta that Swami Vivekananda carried to the West. The seeds of Vedanta that he sowed there have sprouted and,

during the past one hundred years, they have influenced Western thought in diverse ways. More specifically, Vedanta in the West is identified with the Ramakrishna Movement. Since this movement is broad-based and pluralistic, Vedanta has come to mean different things to different people. There are people who speak of 'American Vedanta' or 'Western Vedanta' as a distinct spiritual movement in the present Western socio-cultural context. The message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda has given rise to a vast literature in which diverse streams of thought have mingled. It is therefore necessary to identify the basic principles and philosophical concepts, which form the foundation of the modern Vedanta Movement. But this conceptual framework can be understood properly only in relation to the original conceptual framework of traditional Vedanta.

Traditional Meaning of Vedanta

The term 'Vedanta' has four well-recognized meanings in the ancient Hindu tradition. The literal meaning of Vedanta is 'the end of the Vedas', that is, the last part of the Vedas. The Vedas are divided into four parts of which the last part is constituted by the Upaniṣads. Hence Vedanta is often regarded as a collective term for the Upaniṣads. According to Shankara and other Ācāryas the nature of Brahman, the ultimate Reality, can be known only from the Upaniṣads. Hence Vedanta, in the sense of the Upaniṣads, is spoken as the *pramāṇa* or 'instrument of knowledge' (*vedānto nāma upaniṣad — pramāṇam*).

In Shankara's commentaries 'Vedanta' is often used to mean *Vedānta-vākya*, a statement in the Upaniṣads which contains an axiomatic truth such as 'That thou art'. According to many authorities on Advaita, such Vedantic statements have the power to induce intuitive knowledge of Brahman in purified minds. The term 'Vedanta' therefore means knowledge of Brahman revealed by Upaniṣadic statements. The total corpus of spiritual truths contained in the Upaniṣads is known as *Brahma-vidyā*. Vedanta is *Brahma-vidyā*. Swami Vivekananda has used 'Vedanta' in this sense on several occasions in his lectures. According to him, just as science deals with the eternal truths and laws of the physical universe, so religion deals with eternal truths of the spiritual realm. Swamiji often used the term 'Vedanta' to mean the aggregate of the eternal and universal truths of the spiritual world.

Vedanta means not only knowledge but also the means or process of knowing Brahman. Hence Vedanta is spoken of as *Brahma-jijñāsā*, 'enquiry into Brahman'. In the Upaniṣads this process of enquiry is described as consisting of three steps: *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana*. In the *Gita* the method for knowing Brahman is called Yoga; it speaks of several Yogas such as Jñāna-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, etc. In later centuries the term *sādhanā* became a general term for the means or method of realization of the ultimate Reality.

The fourth and most well-known meaning of Vedanta is *Vedanta Darśana* or the system of philosophy based on the aphorisms of Bādarāyana known as the *Brahma-sūtras*. Although six systems of Hindu philosophy are recognized, the Vedanta system alone formed the living philosophy of mainstream Hinduism. The other five systems were confined to small groups of thinkers; they never became the basis of the living faith of Hindus and are now only of academic interest.

As a system of philosophy, Vedanta is a broad frame of thought which allows several perspectives of Reality. This is because the *Brahma-sūtras*, on which the Vedanta system is based, lend themselves to different interpretations. This has given rise to several schools of thought within the Vedanta system such as *Dvaita* (Dualism), *Viśiṣṭa-advaita* (Qualified Monism), *Advaita* (Non-dualism), and so on. Nevertheless, in spite of this diversity of perspectives, the central concepts of Vedanta are unique to the system as a whole and are shared by all the schools of Vedanta. To these basic concepts we now turn.

Basic Concepts of Traditional Vedanta

Primacy of Consciousness

The most fundamental and unique tenet of Vedanta is that the ultimate Reality is of the nature of pure consciousness, which is self-existent and infinite. In almost all the systems of thought all over the world, consciousness is regarded as an attribute of the mind. The very word 'consciousness' raises the question, 'consciousness of what?' That is to say, consciousness must always have a 'content', a reference to an object. But in ancient India the idea developed that consciousness exists by itself, independent of mind and matter, as a pure, 'contentless' entity without any reference to an object.

Furthermore, it was discovered in ancient India that consciousness is also independent of the notion of 'I' or ego. Our real nature is not the ego. Beyond the ego and forming its substratum, there lies pure consciousness, which is the true Self of man known as the Atman. The ego is characterized by three notions:

- The notion of 'I' and 'mine' (*ahamkāra*)
- The notion of being the enjoyer of objects (*bhoktṛtva*)
- The notion of being the doer of actions (*kartṛtva*)

The Atman or true Self is devoid of all these three notions.

The concept of Atman is shared also by the other five systems of Hindu philosophy, but unlike Vedanta, they uphold the doctrine of plurality of selves; according to them, there are as many selves as there are individuals. Vedanta holds the view that all individual selves are parts or reflections of a supreme universal Self, known as Paramātman or Brahman. As regards the relation between individual selves and the Supreme Self there are differences of opinions among the different schools of Vedanta. According to the Advaita school, selfhood is illusory, and does not persist once liberation is attained. According to the other schools, selfhood is real and the individual Atman persists even in the state of liberation. But all the schools of Vedanta agree on one point: they all regard Brahman as the ultimate Reality.

Furthermore, Vedanta considers Brahman to be the ultimate cause of the universe — the material cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) as well as the instrumental cause (*nimitta-kāraṇa*). Among the other systems of Hindu philosophy, Sāmkhya and Yoga regard Prakriti as the material cause of the universe; and the Nyāya-Vaisheshika system regards pre-existent atoms as the material cause of the universe. All the schools of Vedanta accept Brahman as the ultimate cause of the universe. The whole universe originates in Brahman, is sustained by Brahman, and finally dissolves into Brahman. The important assumption here is that matter originates from consciousness and not vice versa.

From our discussion above, four concepts regarding consciousness emerge:

- Consciousness is self-existent and is independent of the mind and matter.
- Pure consciousness is the true Self or Atman, and it is different from the ego.

- All forms of individual consciousness are parts of one Supreme, infinite consciousness known as Brahman or Paramātman.
- Brahman is the material cause as well as the instrumental cause of the universe.

These four concepts of consciousness constitute the most quintessential core of Vedanta. Indeed, consciousness is the dominant theme of Vedanta. It may not be wrong to treat Vedanta as the science of consciousness, for in no other system in the world has consciousness been studied in such profundity and in such a systematic way as has been done in Vedanta. Anybody who wants to understand Vedanta should understand consciousness first.

Consciousness is the most immediate fact of experience. Every object is known *through* consciousness; but consciousness itself is directly known. It is on this bedrock of experience of consciousness that the whole edifice of Vedanta has been built. In Western thought, Edmund Husserl (the founder of Phenomenology) and one or two other thinkers attempted to build systems of philosophy on the basis of the immediate experience of consciousness, but they regarded consciousness only as a property of the mind and relied only on speculation, which never reached deeper levels of consciousness.

According to Vedanta, consciousness has two aspects: an immanent aspect and a transcendental aspect. The immanent aspect is the experience of one's own existence (*astitva*). Every human is aware that he or she exists. The experience of one's own existence (*astitva*) does not need any proof; for it is self-evident (*svataḥsiddha*).[2]

What is the real nature of this Atman or true Self, which is experienced as self-existence? The real nature (*svarūpa*) of the Self is not self-evident, for, had it been so, everybody would have had knowledge of Brahman without any effort. We have only *astitva-jñāna*, that is, we only know that we exist; but we don't have *svarūpa-jñāna*, that is, we don't know the real nature of our existence, our Self. This is because of *anādi-ajñāna*, beginningless ignorance called Maya.

Shankara has clearly stated in different contexts that the real nature of the Atman as Brahman cannot be known either through sense-perception or through reasoning based on inference. *Svarūpa-jñāna* of the Atman represents the transcendental aspect of Brahman. How to gain knowledge of this transcendental

aspect of Brahman? According to Shankara, this knowledge is gained only through *Śruti*, the Vedas.

He divides the Vedas into two main parts. One part, known as the *Karma-kāṇḍa*, consists of those books which deal with hymns and rituals. This part gives knowledge about heaven and other higher worlds, which may be attained by the performance of rituals. The other part of the Vedas, known as the *Jñāna-kāṇḍa*, consists of the Upaniṣads. This part alone gives the knowledge of Brahman. So, when Shankara says that the real nature of the Atman as Brahman can be known only from the *Śruti*, what he means is that it can be known only from the Upaniṣads. The *Karma-kāṇḍa* part is authoritative only in the field of rituals and is meant for those who are not qualified to know Brahman.

But then, what about the idea that the real nature of the Self is a matter of direct realization, *aparokṣānubhūti*, which is very popular in modern times? Shankara does not minimize the importance of direct experience. According to him, the knowledge of Brahman gained from scriptures must lead to direct experience (*anubhava avasānatvāt*).[3] What is he driving at here? It is clear that, for Shankara, direct experience (*anubhava*) is not a *pramāṇa* or proof but a *puruśārtha*, the ultimate value or goal to be fulfilled. If individual, personal experience is regarded as a *pramāṇa* or proof of the real nature of the Atman, then anybody can claim the validity of his view of Reality on the ground that it is *his* experience. To be free from individual errors of knowledge and judgement, *pramāṇa* or proof must be universal and common to all people. That universal and common *pramāṇa* is provided by *Śruti*. The importance of *anubhava* or experience lies in the fact that it is the only means of getting Mukti or liberation.

The above concepts of Shankara, namely, (1) that the knowledge of the existence of the Self (*astitva-jñāna*) is a self-evident fact; (2) whereas the knowledge of the true nature of the Self (*svarūpa-jñāna*) as Atman-Brahman can be had only from *Śruti*; (3) and *anubhava* or direct experience is not a *pramāṇa* or proof but a means of attaining the ultimate *puruśārtha* known as Mukti or liberation — are shared by most of the other Ācāryas who belong to the dualistic schools of Vedanta. These three concepts define the traditional view on *Śruti vis-à-vis anubhava* still prevalent among orthodox circles in Hinduism.

Role of Ignorance

If consciousness is the sole Reality, how can the appearance of the world with its myriads of objects be explained? If our real nature is the Atman, why don't we realize it? How to explain bondage? Why do we identify ourselves with our bodies and minds? Why are we subject to delusion and sorrow? Vedanta attempts to answer these and other questions with the help of the concept of ignorance, known as *avidyā*, *ajñāna*, or Maya. In no other philosophical system in the world does ignorance play such a pivotal role as it does in Vedanta, especially Advaita Vedanta.

The term *ajñāna*, *avidyā* or 'ignorance' generally means absence of knowledge or inadequate knowledge. It is a state of mind, a subjective experience. It is in this sense that most dualistic schools use the term *avidyā* or ignorance. Ignorance is overcome by knowledge, which is gained through the guru or from the scripture.

Shankara, however, uses the term *avidyā* to mean *adhyāsa* or illusory knowledge.[4] By illusory knowledge is meant mistaking one thing for another, as for example, mistaking a rope for a snake. According to him all empirical and worldly knowledge is of this kind. It comes from the superimposition of the mind, body, etc. on the pure Atman.

Post-Shankara Advaitins went one step further: According to them ignorance is not mere absence of knowledge but something 'positive' (*bhāvarūpam*) and 'objective' (*yat kinca*). It is this positive aspect of *ajñāna* that gives rise to the world.

It was stated earlier that Brahman is the material cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) of the universe. But, since pure Brahman is unchangeable, how can it transform itself into the world? The answer given by Advaitins is that the world as we see it is not absolutely real; it is only an appearance, and Brahman undergoes not a real transformation but only an apparent transformation known as *vivarta*. This apparent transformation is brought about by Maya or *ajñāna*. Therefore Maya is described as *vikāri-upādāna* (the changing cause), whereas Brahman is described as *avikāri-upādāna* (the unchanging cause).

The dualistic schools of Vedanta reject the idea of *ajñāna* as the cause of the universe. According to them, the world is real and is created by Divine Will. *Ajñāna* or ignorance has a role only in the lives of individuals; by creating

the false identity of the Self with the body and attachment to objects, *ajñāna* causes bondage and suffering.

God, Soul, Universe

God, the soul, and the universe constitute the triangle of Reality. Regarding their nature and inter-relationships, there exist different views among religions and schools of philosophy. In the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, God is primarily the Creator of the universe. In Vedanta God is the Origin of the Creator of the universe. Divine Reality is conceived in a hierarchical manner. The ultimate level is occupied by the impersonal Absolute known as Nirguṇa Brahman. Next in order comes the personal God known as Saguṇa Brahman or Īshvara. At these two levels, the Reality is infinite, beginningless, and unchanging. From Īshvara arises the Cosmic Soul known as Hiraṇyagarbha, who corresponds in some respects to Logos in ancient Greek thought. From Hiraṇyagarbha arises the manifested universe known as Virāt, which corresponds to the concept of the Demiurge in Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy. In ancient Vedantic literature the term Prajāpati or 'Lord of Creatures', which comes nearest to the Judeo-Christian concept of the Creator, is applied either to Hiraṇyagarbha or to Virāt.

With regard to the nature of God, the difference between non-dualistic and dualistic schools is this: The non-dualistic school accepts all the levels of Divine Reality mentioned above, but assigns them to two levels of Truth: the *pāramārthika* or the absolute and the *vyāvahārika* or the relative. According to this view, the impersonal Nirguṇa Brahman alone is absolutely true, whereas the other levels of Reality have validity only as long as ignorance persists. The dualistic schools reject the concept of Nirguṇa Brahman and the two levels of Truth. According to them, Saguṇa Brahman or the Personal God, known by different names in different sects, is the highest Reality. Some of the dualists, the Vaishnavas in particular, regard God as having not only personal attributes but also a human form. There are, however, a few sects, which hold God to be non-anthropomorphic (*nirākāra*) but endowed with personal attributes such as omnipotence, love, compassion, etc.

Another idea of traditional Vedanta is that God incarnates Himself in every Age as the Avatar. This idea, introduced by the *Gita*, is accepted by all

schools of Vedanta. There are in all ten Avatars who form, as the distinguished British biophysicist J. B. S. Haldane has pointed out, an ascending series of evolution from the fish and the tortoise and culminating in the ninth Avatar, Sri Krishna. This is the most widely accepted view. But according to the Bengal school of Vaishnavism, Krishna is not an Avatar but the supreme Godhead himself. In his place they include Buddha as the ninth Avatar. It is believed that the tenth Avatar is yet to appear. Shankara, however, states in his famous introduction to the *Gita* that God's Incarnation is only a semblance: God appears *as if* born, *as if* embodied (*jāta iva*, *dehavān iva*).

Like Descarte's *cogito ergo sum* ('I think, so I exist'), the nature of the soul is the starting and central point of discussion in Vedanta. Only the Vedantin would reverse the order of words in Descarte's axiom, and put it as, 'I exist, so I think'. There are two concepts in this field which distinguish Vedanta from the Judeo-Christian faith and Western philosophy in general. In the Vedantic view, the human personality is trichotomous; it consists of the body, the mind, and the Self. Of these the Self, known as the Atman, is the real nature of man, the other two being only coverings on the true Self. In the Judeo-Christian view the human personality is dichotomous; it consists of only the body and the mind. The terms 'soul' and 'spirit' mean nothing but the mind.

The second point is that, unlike the Judeo-Christian view that the soul is created by God, all schools of Vedanta hold that the true Self of man is uncreated, beginningless, and is an integral part or reflection of the Supreme Self. There is, however, a basic difference between the non-dualistic school of Vedanta and the dualistic schools regarding the ultimate reality of the individual Self. The Advaita school considers individuality to be illusory: it does not persist in the state of liberation. In Advaita the word 'Atman' is used to mean not only the individual Self but also Brahman, for both are ultimately one. In the Dvaita schools the word 'Atman' is used to mean only the individual Self. According to these schools, individuality is real and, although the Atman is an inseparable part of Brahman, it remains forever distinct from Brahman, even in the state of liberation.

Coming to the nature of the world, there are two points of difference between Vedanta and the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the Judeo-Christian tradition God is extra-cosmic, that is to say, God exists outside the universe, and the terms 'immanence', 'omnipresence', etc. refer to God's *will*, not to his

essence. According to Vedanta, God is intra-cosmic, that is to say, God exists in the innermost core of the universe. God is the soul and the universe is God's body; and the terms immanence, omnipresence, etc. refer to the *essence* of God, Brahman. Regarding this, the difference between Advaita and dualistic schools of Vedanta is that, according to the former, Brahman alone is real whereas the universe is an illusory superimposition upon Brahman. The Dualists hold the world to be real, although impermanent; they do not equate impermanence with unreality.

The second difference between Vedantic and Judeo-Christian views of the world is with regard to time. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, creation is a single, non-recurring, unique, time-bound phenomenon. In the Vedantic tradition, time is beginningless and open-ended; and creation is an ever-recurring series of projections and dissolutions of the universe.

Human Destiny

Closely connected with the above view of the universe is the Vedantic view of human destiny. Man's life on earth is regarded as a state of bondage by which is meant the state of being subjected to repeated cycles of birth and death. The cause of bondage is ignorance of one's true nature as the Atman. When, after repeated rebirths, a person acquires knowledge of his true Self, he is freed from the cycles of birth and death. This everlasting freedom, known as Mukti or Moksha, is the ultimate goal of human life.

The Vedantic idea of liberation, which allows every person a series of births to gain experience and attain spiritual illumination, stands in striking contrast to the Judeo-Christian idea of salvation, which offers a choice between eternal beatitude and eternal damnation based on the experience of a single lifetime.

In Vedanta, Mukti is not a mere negative state of freedom from bondage and suffering, as it is in some other systems of Hindu philosophy. Mukti also means the attainment of unity with Brahman and the experience of boundless, everlasting bliss. The nature of this 'unity' is a point of controversy among the different schools of Vedanta. For the Advaitins the unity of the individual Self with Brahman is of the nature of absolute oneness without any distinction between the two. For the dualists the unity of the individual self with the

Supreme Self means only organic unity, like the relationship between the parts and the whole; individuality is not totally lost but remains distinct.

Although belief in salvation or liberation as the ultimate destiny of man is shared by all the major religions of the world, regarding the means of attaining it there is a basic difference between the so-called 'prophetic religions', which had their origin in the Middle East, and the 'mystical religions', which had their origin in India. In the former group of religions, faith is regarded as an adequate means to salvation, whereas in the religions of Indian origin, direct realization of the ultimate Reality or Truth is regarded as the sole means of attaining liberation. Even the Bhakti schools of Vedanta, which give primary importance to divine Grace, hold that God reveals Himself first, before granting liberation. Emphasis on God-realization is thus a central feature of Vedanta.

In the Indian tradition, liberation means freedom from rebirth. Since the cause of rebirth is the residual effect of karma done in the past (known as *sancita-karma* or *karmāśaya* or, simply, *karma*), only by destroying this residual karma can liberation be obtained. There are two broad ways of destroying residual karma, and they constitute the two main *mārgas* or highways to liberation. The two highways are: *Jñāna-mārga* and *Bhakti-mārga*. The first highway is followed mainly by Advaita Vedanta, while the second one is followed by the Bhakti schools of Vedanta.

The Advaita view is that, since the cause of karma is Avidyā or ignorance of the true nature of the Self, with the dawn of true knowledge this primordial ignorance is destroyed and, along with that, the effects of that ignorance such as self-hood, residual karma, etc. also get destroyed. When individuality itself disappears, the question of there being a recipient of past karma does not arise.[5] For Shankara the attainment of true knowledge of Brahman itself is liberation; there is no time gap between the two.

The Bhakti schools hold that destruction of residual karma is brought about by divine Grace. God has the power to do, undo, or modify (*kartum*, *akartum*, *anyathā vā kartum*) past karma. The *Gita* declares that those who surrender themselves totally to God and meditate on Him with undivided attention are lifted out of transmigratory existence by the Lord himself.[6]

It may be mentioned here that, apart from the two 'highways', viz. *Jñāna-mārga* and *Bhakti-mārga*, described above, a third highway known as *Karma-*

mārga was developed by the Mīmāmsaka philosophers in the eighth and ninth centuries AD. They held that the residual effect of karma (which they called *Shakti* or potency) couldn't be destroyed either by *jñāna* or by *bhakti*. The only way is to exhaust the residual effect of karma through experience in life (*na abhuktam kṣīyate karma*). In order to prevent the deposit of fresh *karma-phala*, the Mīmāmsakas held that we should do all work without expectation of any results. The eighth-century Mīmāmsaka philosopher Prabhākara developed something like Kant's concept of 'categorical imperative' and also the idea of 'duty for duty's sake'. Since this view made nonsense of both *jñāna* and *bhakti*, all the Ācāryas of the different schools of Vedanta attacked it, with the result that *Karma-mārga* as an independent highway did not develop after the tenth century in India. Thus, *Jñāna-mārga* and *Bhakti-mārga* remain the only two highways in Vedanta in modern times.

Within these two *mārgas* or highways, there are several specific spiritual disciplines known by the term 'Yoga'. Traditional Vedanta recognizes only three main Yogas, namely, Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, and Jñāna-Yoga. The fourth Yoga known as Rāja-Yoga, which is popular in modern times, is not recognized as an independent Yoga in traditional Vedanta. The discipline of dhyāna or meditation and the laws and principles of concentration, which belong to Rāja-Yoga, are integrated into either Bhakti-Yoga or Jñāna-Yoga under the term *upāsanā*.

Regarding these Yogas, the traditional views held by Ācāryas are as follows:

- Each *mārga* has its own set of three Yogas. Karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, and Jñāna-Yoga have their place in *Bhakti-mārga* as well as *Jñāna-mārga*, but they are practised in different ways in the two *mārgas*.

- All the Ācāryas are against the idea of a combination (*samuccaya*) of the three Yogas as the means to Mukti. Shankara has strongly criticized all attempts at combining *jñāna* with *karma* and *upāsanā*.[7] According to him *jñāna* is the sole means of realizing Nirguṇa Brahman, the Impersonal Absolute. *Upāsanā* or meditation can lead only to the realization of Saguṇa Brahman, the Personal God. Rāmānuja and the other Ācāryas hold that *bhakti* is the sole means of realizing Brahman, which according to them is Personal.

- All the Ācāryas are unanimous in holding that Karma-Yoga by itself cannot be a direct means to Mukti. Shankara's view is that, when the duties of life are performed well, it results in purification of the mind and, after death, the attainment of the world of manes (*pitṛloka*). When work is combined with *upāsanā*, it leads to the attainment of the world of Hiraṇyagarbha. When, however, work is done as worship of the all-pervading Supreme Lord, the person acquires the 'fitness to attain supreme knowledge' (*jñānaniṣṭhā-yogyatā*).[8] The Ācāryas of *Bhakti-mārga* also assign a low status to Karma-Yoga, only as a means to purification of the mind.

Ethical Foundation

The basic principles of traditional Vedanta discussed above form a self-contained philosophical system. These principles deal with the ultimate Reality, which transcends the body and mind. This does not, however, mean that Vedanta is totally divorced from morality and moral concerns. On the contrary, Vedanta is built on a solid foundation of ethical principles derived from certain universal laws governing life as a whole.

- *The Moral Order of the Universe*: The basis of all moral laws is the belief that there is a universal moral order governing the psycho-physical life of humanity. This moral order has been conceived in different ways in different religions. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the moral order is conceived as a 'covenant' or contract between God and man. An immoral act is a violation of this sacred contract, which means 'disobedience' to God. This is what 'sin' means; it provokes God's wrath and punishment. In the Indian tradition, the moral order is regarded as a natural, self-regulating cosmic principle known as *ṛta* or *dharma* (somewhat similar to the Stoic concept of Logos in ancient Greece). Immorality, known as *pāpa*, is a violation of universal Dharma, and retribution for it is brought about by the Law of Karma, the function of God in this process being that of a supervisor (*karmādhyakṣa*).

- *The Theory of Samskāras*: The question, what makes people act immorally, has different answers in different religions. In Christianity the cause of evil is attributed partly to the Original Sin of Adam and Eve

and partly to the work of the Devil. In Vedanta the tendency to act immorally is traced to the *samskāras* or predispositions derived from the actions and experiences of one's previous birth. The ultimate cause of evil is *ajñāna* or ignorance of one's true nature as the Atman.

- *The Law of Sacrifice*: In the Vedic period social and moral life was governed by the Law of Sacrifice. Universal Life is a vast and indescribably complex network of interdependent forces, which are all in a state of flux. This unceasing flow and interdependence are maintained by refunding to Universal Life, in some form or other, whatever is taken from it. It was this process of refunding that Vedic Aryans symbolized as *Yajña* or sacrifice. The *Gita* describes the whole complex of interrelationships in Universal Life as *Yajña-cakra*, 'the wheel of sacrifice', and states that whoever does not follow this 'wheel' lives in vain.[9] The basic idea is that an individual should not live only for himself but should sacrifice his comforts for the welfare of others. With the decline of Vedic culture, the external ritualistic aspect of *Yajña* ceased to be in vogue, but its moral and spiritual aspects survived as the basis for Karma-Yoga, which constitutes the central message of the *Gita*.

- *The Law of Karma*: In the post-Vedic age the Law of Sacrifice gave way to the Law of Karma. Whereas the Law of Sacrifice deals with what we give to Universal Life, the Law of Karma determines what we actually receive from Life. The Law of Karma holds that every action of man produces an unseen potentiality, which will fructify at a future time (usually in the next birth) and determine the circumstances and experiences of his life then. When properly understood, the Law of Karma induces a person to take upon himself responsibility for his actions and endure adversities with stoic calmness. But if not properly understood, the Law of Karma can generate a fatalistic attitude, sense of helplessness, and lack of initiative. These tendencies dominated Indian society, especially after the country's loss of political freedom.

The four laws pertaining to Dharma, Samskāra, Yajña, and Karma discussed above together constitute the ethical foundation of traditional Vedanta. They provide the logic of moral conduct in Hinduism.

However, the moral principles and codes of conduct followed in the practical, social life of the Hindus are derived from family traditions and the conventions of caste. Caste probably originated from the belief that every person has an aptitude or capacity for a particular type of work known as *svadharma*, and that people with the same *svadharma* tend to be born in a particular 'caste'. In a class or guild, admission is voluntary and, by acquiring more wealth or education, one may move from a lower class to a higher one. But membership in a caste is determined entirely by birth, and there is no vertical mobility in it.

Whatever might have been the original function of caste, over the centuries it became an engine of social tyranny, exploitation, and injustice, and has contributed in no small measure to the political downfall and economic backwardness of India. Although Vedanta is a self-contained system of philosophy, it could not escape the tentacles of the institution of caste. All the Ācāryas supported the caste system. As a consequence the sublime truths of Vedanta remained in the exclusive possession of a class of privileged people for centuries. It was Swami Vivekananda who freed Vedanta from the stranglehold of Hindu orthodoxy and made it a Universal Religion.

Three Phases of Vedanta

Vedanta is not a static philosophy or religion. It is a highly dynamic, ever growing philosophy and religion capable of meeting challenges and overcoming obstacles. In this process of growth, Vedanta has passed through three phases.

1) *Formative phase*: This phase extended from around 1000 BC to 3rd century BC. During this period the Upaniṣads, the *Gita*, and the *Brahma-sūtras* (these three scriptures are together called *prasthāna-trayа*) provided the basic concepts of Vedanta such as Atman, Brahman, *karma*, *yoga*, *mukti*, etc.

2) *Scholastic phase*: This phase extended from about the 8th century AD to the 13th century. During this period great teachers like Shankara expounded and expanded the original intuitive insights of Vedic Rishis and the teachings of the *Gita*, and established Vedanta as a cogent comprehensive system of philosophy — the most cogent and comprehensive religious philosophy the world has ever seen.

But during this period Vedanta split into a number of philosophical schools and religious sects. The main philosophical schools were the following:

- Advaita or non-dualism propounded by Shankara
- Viśiṣṭa-advaita propounded by Ramanuja
- Dvaita propounded by Madhva
- Śuddha-advaita propounded by Vallabha
- Achintya-bheda-abheda propounded by Jiva Goswami

These schools of philosophy carried on acrimonious debates among themselves which kept up the intellectual vigour of the people. India produced during this period many great scholars and thinkers. But all this intellectual development was confined to a small community and the masses came to be neglected.

The main religious sects were: Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism. Each of these had several sub-sects. These sects produced many saints. These saints spread Vedantic ideas among the common people through songs and teachings.

3) *Modern phase*: The third phase of Vedanta was inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the nineteenth century. During this period Vedanta reintegrated into a composite system, and was transformed from an ethnic religious philosophy into a universal philosophy of life. The main transformations brought about by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are discussed below.

Sri Ramakrishna's Rejuvenation of Vedanta

What has been given in the preceding pages is a bare outline of the basic concepts of traditional Vedanta which lie deeply embedded in the matrix of the Hindu religion. These principles have shaped the culture, thought, and outlook of the people of the Indian subcontinent for hundreds of years. However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when India lost her political sovereignty, social institutions became rigid and customs and rituals began to dominate the religious life of the people and, as a consequence, the Vedantic principles lost much of their vitalizing power and practical relevance.

The decline in culture and national vigour soon produced self-corrective social reactions in the form of socio-religious movements, such as the Brahmo

Samaj and others, in different parts of India. Most of these movements attempted to reform Hindu society by rejecting much of India's spiritual heritage. It was at this juncture that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda arose and started what turned out to be a spiritual renaissance.

Sri Ramakrishna was not a social reformer. He belonged to the class of world prophets such as Buddha and Christ. What was unique about him was that he embarked on a quest for the Ultimate Truth with an intensity and comprehensiveness which have absolutely no precedence in the history of humanity. His stupendous spiritual efforts and experiences enabled him to make important contributions to the welfare and progress of humanity.

One of the most significant of these contributions is the establishment of direct, transcendental experience as the ultimate goal, validity, and raison d'être of religion. It was by basing himself on this principle that Sri Ramakrishna propounded the doctrine of the harmony of religions for which he is more well known. Again, it was by establishing the principle of direct realization that he could re-establish the spiritual ideal in the modern world. For millions of people who had lost faith in God, in religious books, institutions, and spiritual values, Sri Ramakrishna's categorical assurance of direct realization provided a means to acquire, recover, or retain faith. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, 'In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light.'

Another contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to world culture is the revalidation and purification of spiritual paths. During the more than three thousand years of the history of Hinduism, innumerable spiritual paths and techniques were developed by Hindu sages, but owing to the long passage of time, many of these paths became obscure or forgotten or degenerated into occult practices. Sri Ramakrishna went through the entire range of spiritual practices — from ritualistic worship, which is considered to be the lowest form of spiritual practice, to the highest contemplation on Brahman. In the course of his twelve-year-long *sādhanā*, he rediscovered and revalidated many of the ancient spiritual paths. He separated the luminous holy paths from the dark, unholy ones, which gradually ceased to be in vogue. He also introduced the idea of freedom in the choice of spiritual path: everyone should follow that path which is best suited to his temperament.

Before Sri Ramakrishna came, Hinduism was a loose federation of sects and communities, each with its own pantheon, scripture, philosophy, practices, and customs. Sri Ramakrishna did not identify himself with any sect or school of thought but looked upon Hinduism as a whole. He accepted the different conceptions of Godhead such as Personal (*saguṇa*) and Impersonal (*nirguṇa*); the different deities and Avatars; the different pathways such as Bhakti, Jñāna, Yoga, and Karma; the degrees of realization such as Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita; the different ways of life such as the monastic life and the householder's life. This liberal and integral approach of Sri Ramakrishna has considerably helped to bring about an overall unification of Hinduism and a harmony among its sects in modern times.

Sri Ramakrishna did not confine his spiritual quest within the bounds of Hinduism. Ignoring the conventions of a conservative society and the criticism of people, he reached out to other religions and, by actually following the spiritual paths of those religions, developed his doctrine of the harmony of religions which opened a new epoch in the history of human culture. This doctrine of the harmony of religions has certain distinctive features.

- It was derived from his own direct experience and not from books or a flight of fancy.
- He recognized differences among religions and spiritual paths.
- From his higher experiences he realized that, in spite of these differences, the paths of all religions lead to the realization of the same ultimate Reality.
- The ultimate Reality is one but is known by different names.
- Realization of the ultimate Reality is the main purpose and goal of all religions.

Like the other great prophets of religion, Sri Ramakrishna tried to establish the moral ideal. His uncompromising insistence on truth and the renunciation of lust and lucre in his teachings acts as a bulwark against the growing trends of unbridled pleasure-seeking and corruption in contemporary society.

Although the idea of the immanence of God in creation was known in India as early as the Vedic times, it was Sri Ramakrishna who for the first time brought out the immense practical and social implications of that principle. As

expounded by Sri Ramakrishna, the principle of divine immanence has three main implications:

- It holds that man's real nature is divine.
- It divinizes human relationships; service to man is service to God.
- It spiritualizes man's whole outlook on life.

Not that Sri Ramakrishna ignored the evil, suffering, and transitoriness which characterize life. But the remedy for them is not to brood over them but to transcend them by attaining spiritual illumination. To the illumined person the whole world becomes transfigured and becomes a 'mart of joy'. These ideas of the divinity of man, divinization of life, and a bracing, positive outlook on life constitute yet another very important contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to modern world thought.

These contributions of Sri Ramakrishna have helped to bring about a thorough rejuvenation, enrichment and empowerment of Vedanta in modern times on a scale which was never seen in India after the preaching of the *Gita* by Sri Krishna. It was, however, through Swami Vivekananda that the fruits of Sri Ramakrishna's great work have become available to humanity.

Swamiji's Exposition of Vedanta

The great insight Swami Vivekananda developed was to realize that Sri Ramakrishna was the living embodiment of the eternal truths of Vedanta, and that his life and message had great significance for the Indian nation on the one hand and for the whole humanity on the other. Swamiji saw that Sri Ramakrishna had not only relived the entire spiritual history of the land, but had also separated in the fire of his *tapas* the essential, universal, and living truths of Vedanta, and had adapted them to the needs of the present age.

After the Master's passing away, Swamiji travelled all over India as a mendicant monk and was deeply moved at the sight of the appalling poverty and backwardness of the masses. At a time when social reformers in India were busy with the remarriage of widows and the abolition of idol worship, Swamiji pointed out that the real cause of India's degradation was the neglect of the masses. At the same time, Swamiji saw that, in spite of the destitution and backwardness of the masses, religion was a living force in their lives. Spirituality

formed the life-centre of the nation, and the best way to rejuvenate the nation was to revitalize that centre. Unlike the social reformers, Swamiji realized that the downfall of India took place not because of its religion but because the life-giving principles of Vedanta had not been properly applied in practical life and had not been made available to the poor and downtrodden millions.

It is well known that one of the reasons for Swamiji's going to the West was to seek funds for this work of uplifting the masses in India. In the West Swamiji saw that, although the people had eliminated poverty, disease, and backwardness to a great extent, they had psycho-spiritual and social problems. He felt that the life-giving principles of Vedanta could help them solve these problems.

Thus in his enlightened vision Swamiji saw that his mission on earth was to expound and make available to the common masses in India as well as to the people in the West the inspiring, creative principles of Vedanta as lived and taught by his Master.

Swamiji, however, knew that, if Vedanta was to become a universal philosophy-cum-way of life, it should fulfil three main conditions:

- The timeless, universal, philosophical principles must be separated from the anachronistic, narrow, institutional, mythological, and cultic elements of the parent religious matrix.
- The universal principles are to be expressed in the modern idiom adapted to the spirit of the modern age.
- It should be practicable, applicable in all walks of life, and should produce beneficial results.

The re-creation of Vedanta for the modern age fulfilling these three conditions was the great work accomplished by Swamiji. Some of the basic principles of Vedanta expounded by Swamiji are briefly discussed below.

Basic Postulates of Modern Vedanta

1. Potential Divinity of the Soul

This telling phrase implies the following points:

- In the first place, it means that man's real nature is neither the body nor the mind but the Atman, which is a part or reflection (real or illusory) of the Supreme Self known as Brahman.

- The word 'divine' in the phrase refers not to God as this term is understood in the Judeo-Christian tradition, nor to Īshvara of Vedanta but to Brahman.
- The word 'potential' is also significant; it means that in ordinary people the knowledge of one's true Self as Brahman remains dormant or veiled by ignorance.
- Since man's true nature is the Atman, he can never attain lasting fulfillment or peace until he realizes the Atman, which alone can free him from bondage.

2. Direct Experience of the Ultimate Reality as the

- The ultimate goal and purpose of human life.
- The true test and proof of religious truths.
- The common ground of all religions.

3. Divinization of Life

God is immanent in creation; life is the gradual unfoldment of the glory, power, and joy of Brahman. This doctrine implies the following:

- All life is sacred; hence there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular.
- All human relationships are sacred. Everyone should be treated with respect, irrespective of the distinctions of caste, creed or race.
- All work is worship of the Virāṭ.

4. Synthesis of Yogas

We have seen that in traditional Vedanta there was controversy about the relative superiority of *jñāna* and *bhakti*, and that *karma* was given a low status by all the schools. Swami Vivekananda showed that all the four yogas were independent means to *mukti*, but the ideal means was a synthesis of all the four yogas.

5. Harmony of Religions

This unique doctrine propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda implies the following points:

- The ultimate Reality is one but known by different names.
- There are, however, many paths to the ultimate Reality.

- Everyone should stick to his own path but should honour and accept some of the best elements of other religions.
- Divine revelation has occurred at different places and times. The founders of world religions are special manifestations of God and should be honoured as such.

6. Harmony of Religion and Science

Swami Vivekananda held that science is not opposed to Vedanta but is complementary to it. They both represent man's quest for Truth — only science operates at the empirical plane whereas religion begins as a struggle to transcend the sense plane. Furthermore, Swamiji showed that some of the ancient Indian conceptions regarding time, creation of the universe, etc. are surprisingly similar to those of science.

7. Universal Ethics

Swami Vivekananda attempted to develop a system of universal ethics which stresses innate purity, selflessness, equality, freedom, and strength as the chief virtues. Impurities affect only the mind; but beyond that, the real nature of man is ever pure, free, and divine. This means man is not a born sinner or inherently weak. Everyone has in him the source of infinite strength. Furthermore, since all souls are equal as the Atman and are one in the Supreme Self, distinctions of class, caste, race, etc. have no real basis, and it is possible to develop an ideal society free from such invidious distinctions.

8. Service as a way of life

Although traditional Vedanta emphasized the oneness of Brahman, this noble doctrine was never applied in practical life. Swami Vivekananda showed that if all individual selves are one in the Supreme Self, serving others should be as natural as taking care of oneself. Swamiji regarded selfishness as the root cause of all evil, and the greatest obstacle to spiritual unfoldment and social progress. Everyone should regard service as a natural way of living in this world. He particularly emphasized service to the poor and the downtrodden.

Conclusion

It can be easily seen that the modernized concepts of Vedanta given above do not differ substantially from the traditional concepts of Vedanta discussed earlier. The differences between them are mostly in linguistic expression and practical application.

The concepts of Vedanta developed by Swamiji constitute the philosophical basis of the Ramakrishna Movement. They are not, however, confined to the Ramakrishna Movement. As a matter of fact, they have to a great extent replace traditional concepts in modern Hinduism. Most educated Hindus of the present day accept Swamiji's interpretation of Vedanta unquestioningly, although they may not follow his terminology, and they may not be even aware that Swamiji is the originator of those concepts. The difference between traditional concepts and their modern interpretation is known only to a few scholars in India and the modern 'Indologists', some of whom try to play down the influence of Swami Vivekananda in modern Hinduism.

In the West, where the Ramakrishna Movement is known as the Vedanta Movement, the philosophical concepts of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have become an independent Universal Religion with no clearly defined boundaries, and having a modest following.

References

1 F. Max Müller, *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy.*

2 Shankara, *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, 1.1.1.

3 Ibid., 1.1.2.

4 *Tam, etam, evam lakṣaṇam adhyāsam paṇḍitaḥ avidyā iti manyante* — Shankara, *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, Introduction.

5 See Shankara's Commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra*, 4.1.13-15.

6 *Gita*, 12.6,7.

7 See Shankara's Commentary on the *Gita*, Introductions to 2nd and 3rd Chapters.

8 This idea Shankara expresses in different contexts, especially in *Gita*, 5.26, 18.9, and 46.

9 *Gita*, 3.16.

Advaita Vedanta as Philosophy and as Religion

J. N. MOHANTY

I

In popular discourse, the word 'Vedanta' has had a wide variety of uses, which I will not try to unravel. In strictly scholarly literature — both Sanskrit and English — the use of this designation is more strictly definable as referring to the philosophy, the *darśana*, that is to say, which is founded upon three 'supports', namely, the Upaniṣads, the *Brahma Sūtras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Taking Vedanta in this sense, one still has to contend with a wide variety of sub-schools, of which Advaita Vedanta, as formulated by Shankara, is one, arguably the most influential one. In this essay, I will be concerned with Advaita Vedanta, whose *philosophical* status is well established. I will ask, can one advance the claim that Advaita Vedanta is also a *religion*?

For many followers and admirers of Advaita Vedanta, this is not even a legitimate question. Generations of scholars have found it to be both unquestionable and inspiring that here in Advaita Vedanta one has a meeting of philosophical enquiry and religious quest. Thus writes N. K. Brahma (my esteemed late teacher in Presidency College):

> In India...religion and philosophy have always kept pace with each other, and in some cases, for example, in the Shankara Vedanta, philosophy and religion have even coincided.[1]

This view is widely shared — the view that the Reality (with a capital 'R') which philosophy seeks to identify conceptually, religion aims at knowing

experientially. Clearly, it is Advaita Vedanta that succeeds in both the tasks, if at all any system of thought does. It is this view that I want to render questionable.

If we have to determine if a whale is a fish, or a bat is a bird, one may proceed in various ways. One may so define the terms 'whale' (e.g., as a huge fish which is warm-blooded and a mammal) and 'fish' (e.g., as an animal which lives and swims in water) that whales would be, by definition, fish. Likewise with 'bird' and 'bat'. Alternately, one may define those terms in such a way that to say that whales are fish would be a contradiction in terms. Both these ways of answering those questions are arbitrary, and are nothing but ways of defending one's preconceived notions. In our present case, we cannot therefore decide the question 'Is Advaita Vedanta a religion?' in such an arbitrary manner. We shall proceed as if the issue is open. One cannot, however, at some point, avoid defining the terms involved, in the present case the term 'religion'. But the definition should be cautious and liberal, i.e. true to the phenomena, and not guided by one's preconceived notions. For example, it would not do to define 'religion' in terms of belief in, and/or an affective-volitional relation to, a God or gods — for there is at least one major religion, namely, Buddhism, which does not have this feature.

I would begin, therefore, by distinguishing between different aspects of religious phenomena. These aspects are:

- Religion as an institution (consisting of temples, churches, mosques; priests; monks and nuns; monasteries, etc.)
- Religion as a liturgical system (rituals, ceremonies, reading/chanting, reciting hymns, mantras, pujas, prayers, etc.)
- Religion as social ethics (do's and don't do's, *vidhi-niṣedha*; moral injunctions; oughts, in relation to other men, animals, and gods)
- Religion as 'inner experience' (consisting in feelings, attitudes, cognitions, mystical experiences, non-mystical faith, etc.)

Of these four, Advaita Vedanta is directly concerned with the last, which, in one of its forms, 'grounds' even the three 'supports' (*prasthānas*) listed at the beginning of this essay, i.e., as an immediate, non-conceptual experience of the identity of one's self with Brahman.

Common to all four groups of 'phenomena', in so far as they are 'religious', is a feeling of sacredness, in the absence of which they all degenerate into

merely sociological, ethical, psychological, or cognitive phenomena. Institutions are religious only in so far as, for those who participate in them, they are experienced as 'sacred'. Liturgies are religious only in so far as those who practise them as well as those who participate in them experience them as sacred. When religion was defined as morality tempered with emotion, what was meant is that an ethical life is not religious unless the ethical is also the sacred. With regard to the Advaita Vedanta, then, the question 'Is Advaita Vedanta a religion?' can be answered if only we can decide the question, 'What has it to do with the sacred?'

This last question is not correctly answered if we look for an 'ontological' (in Heideggers' locution, I should say, 'ontic') source of sacredness. That would be a treacherous path, tempting one to take recourse to a God, gods or deities, angels or saints, or any such entity, to bless your institution's liturgy or morals with an aura of sacredness. That explanation is really not of much help, for any such entity itself has to be believed, related to, worshipped, represented as embodying sacredness — otherwise the account would be self-defeating: a profane source of the experience of sacredness may sanctify the terrors of the most despicable political power.

Besides, the Advaita Vedanta has no room for gods or deities, excepting as a provisional posit. It has no room for God excepting in the context of an (metaphysically) ignorant person's enquiry about the cause of the universe, which unbeknownst to him is only an unreal appearance (and so is not in need of a creator). How then can the Advaita Vedanta's cultivation of self-knowledge (through the standardly accepted stages of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* culminating in an intuitive experience of the identity of the self and Brahman) give rise to an experience of sacredness (and, sacredness of what?) so that it may be called a religion?

II

I have said before that the *philosophical* status of Advaita Vedanta is well established. What I meant thereby is that it is a *darśana*, it has its own logical and conceptual, epistemological and metaphysical basis. If philosophy is, and must be, an intellectual examination and validation of theses (howsoever

received), then Advaita Vedanta has amply demonstrated its claim to be a philosophy. One only needs to think of Shankara's *tarkapāda* (of his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras*), of such works as Madhusudana Saraswati's *Advaita-siddhi*, Śrīharṣa's *Khaṇḍana*, or Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra's *Vedānta-paribhāṣā*. I will not elaborate on this claim.

A philosophy as an intellectual examination of its subject matter (*pramāṇaiḥ arthaparikṣaṇam*) may still be concerned with religion (in any of the senses distinguished earlier) as it may be with art, literature, and ordinary perception. It may, then, result in an intellectual conceptualization of religion in terms of its categories (Hegel); it may be an intellectual justification of religion (as in standard theologies, and their proofs of the existence of God); or, it may be a phenomenology of religious experience and of its object. Advaita Vedanta cannot yield us the first sort of conceptualization of religion (not, to be sure, of Christianity, but not also of Hinduism); it does not and cannot, unlike Nyāya or the theistic Vedantas, result in the second, i.e. in an intellectual justification of religion — it cannot, e.g., give a proof of the existence of God. Shankara *seems* to be doing so in his commentary on *sūtras* such as *Tattu samanvayāt* and *Śāstrayonitvāt*, because of the ambiguity and equivocation between *Īśvara* and Brahman. Does Advaita yield a phenomenology of religious experience?

This last question, which appears to be especially promising for our present purpose, needs to be dealt with in three steps: first, we need to ask, if Vedanta is, or at least contains, a phenomenology? Secondly, if this question is answered in the affirmative, we need to ask further: do we have, in Advaita Vedanta, a phenomenology of religion (or of religious experience)? Finally, we need also to decide if a philosophy which yields a phenomenology of religion, is also itself a religion. That the Advaita Vedanta contains a phenomenology of consciousness, I do not in the least doubt. The well-known doctrine of the levels of consciousness of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep, and the way the theory of false cognition is developed, not to speak of the theory of witness-consciousness (*sākṣi-caitanya*), all these may be regarded as contributing to this phenomenology. A modern version of it is to be found in the late K. C. Bhattacharya's *The Subject as Freedom*. But is this phenomenology also — at least in some segment of it — a phenomenology of religion?

I am not insisting that religion, or the religious attitude, involves a difference between man and god, and so Advaita Vedanta, which denies that difference in favour of one Brahman, cannot be a religion. This argument has been rehearsed time and again, and Shankara responds to it by recognizing that all 'difference' is asserted in the scriptures from the perspective of *upāsanā*, and yet rejects the objection — if objection it is — by saying that identity, and not difference, is the ultimate reality (*bhedasya upāsanārthatvād abhede tātparyāt — Sūtra Bhaṣya* on 3. 2. 12). My search is rather for the sense of sacredness. Is the one, differenceless Brahman a sacred reality, or is it experienced as sacred, such that even the Advaita Vedanta's *brahma-jñāna* may be regarded as religious? On the contrary, it appears as if Advaita Vedanta transcends the religious in any non-arbitrary sense of 'religiosity'.

III

It is at this point that some of the thoughts of the late Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya come to our help. In his essay 'The Advaita and its Spiritual Significance', he reiterates the familiar view that Advaita is 'religion and philosophy in one' (*Studies in Philosophy*, I, 119). As religion, it is 'an inwardizing of one's subjective being, a deepening of one's spiritual individuality'. As philosophy, 'it takes every individual self as the one Self or Reality'. A little later, he also writes:

> (But) the abstract cult of self-knowledge derives its whole meaning from the concrete religion of worship and ceremonial, and is recognizable as a religion only as its concentrated essence (*Studies in Philosophy*, I, pp. 122-23).

Again, in the context of yoga he writes:

> There is no religious striving, for to reach an end through one's might and not through grace is not an activity that is felt as sacred (Ibid., p. 289).

All activity for attaining *mokṣa*, activity as opposed to self-surrender, is, he tells us, super-religious. 'Self-knowledge is a super-religious good in Vedanta; so is *bhakti* in Vaishnava systems' (Ibid., I, p. 289).

K. C. Bhattacharya clearly sees that religion must have something to do with the sacred. If there is to be Advaitic religion, self-knowledge must be sacred knowledge (Ibid., I, p. 118). He writes at another place, 'Knowledge or feeling of the sacred content as such is as sacred as realization itself is sacred' (Ibid., I, p. 288). Consequently, we can surmise that if self-knowledge is to be sacred, the self must be a sacred content. But is it so? Advaita Vedanta is religion only if 'the Atman = Brahman' is a sacred content.

He has also held that Advaita is a religion inasmuch as it leads to an inwardization and deepening of one's subjectivity. One may call this attitude a spiritual attitude, but is it also a religion? It would be so, again, only if the deeper, inner self *qua* self is a sacred object. But is it? We are then left with the question, what are sacred contents? Can we identify some necessary, if not sufficient, marks of sacredness? From K. C. Bhattacharya's various remarks, I can identify two such marks (his view). First, a sacred content (or experience of such a content) must be passively felt. It must overtake and overwhelm you, and must not be the result of voluntary effort. However, some sensuous contents and their experiences have this character (as in the case of a bang of noise which startles you), so one should add to the above characterization a further requirement 'without being itself a sensuous datum'. In this clause 'itself' is inserted to make room for the undeniable fact that a sacred content or experience of such a content may supervene on a sensuous content or experience (as on a smell or sound or visual perception), but the supervening sacredness itself is not a sensuous datum. In any case, passivity and not-being-willed are marks of sacredness. Recall Bhattacharya's remark, quoted earlier:

> There is no religious willing, for to reach an end through one's might and not through grace is not an activity that is felt as sacred.

The other mark, again not a sufficient one, is this. If an experience 'deepens' your subjectivity, places you in touch with your inner being, then it must be a sacred experience. However, while some self-experiences may turn out to have the feature of sacredness, there may be experience of one's inner subjectivity which does not come with that feature. An example would be the way one may discover, by one's own effort or with the help of a psychoanalyst, one's innermost exotic desires hidden from one's surface view. If experience of one's inmost essence as Atman is to be experience of something as a sacred

content, sacredness must characterize that experience for some other reason and not because one is experiencing the depths of one's being. Why then should the Atman be a sacred content?

The Upaniṣads have, in their less metaphysical but more religious moments, asked that one should worship the Atman. But Advaita Vedanta has taken this to be an oblique way of saying either that the Atman ought to be known, or that one may begin (one's spiritual path) by worshipping what is only a symbol of the Atman.

These questionings lead me to find the significance of Bhattacharya's rather subtle remark quoted earlier:

> ...The abstract cult of self-knowledge derives its whole meaning from the concrete religion of worship and ceremonial, and is recognizable as a religion only as its concentrated essence.

What the text means is something like this. The Advaitin who aims at knowing the Atman, also engages in rituals and ceremonies which are experienced as sacred and which are, in a rather straightforward sense, religious. He then *interprets* the self-knowledge he pursues as being symbolized by such clearly sacred rituals. That symbolization confers on the idea of self-knowledge a religious meaning. But devoid of such concrete symbolization, the pure self-knowledge is not, as such, a religious idea or ideal.

The Advaita, in its pure essence, is not a religion. To call it super-religious is a misleading locution, for it suggests misleadingly that it is nevertheless a pre-eminent religion, a religion above all religions. If the earlier questionings have any sense, to regard it as religion even in a most pre-eminent manner is misleading. The Advaita is a philosophy purportedly conceptualizing an alleged experience (of one's Atman) which as such is not an experience of something as sacred, but whose religious character is derived from *associations* with the concrete religious life of the community. The Advaitin worships his own guru, possibly Shankara, or Shiva which symbolizes the Atman. That worship may come with its own sacredness and its own religiosity, and result in a super-imposition (*adhyāsa*) of sacredness upon the experience of Atman.

When I say Advaita Vedanta is not a religion, I will be asked, is it then a philosophy? That it is a philosophy, I have no doubt. But I do not want to say that it is a mere philosophy. What then is it in addition to its being a philosophy?

It is a conceptualization of an experience, an intellectually defensible system; it is also the promise of a path leading from the conceptual system back to the experience it is all about; it is also exegesis of the 'founding' texts. As all these, its exact nature is ambiguous, although the philosophical theses which are asserted are perfectly unambiguous. But one thing is clear: it is in its purity not a religion. The appearance of being religious is due, in Shankara's words, to an *adhyāsa* of sacredness belonging to concrete religious acts and symbols upon the idea of self-knowledge.

Shouldn't we ask: Why do we assume that a body of texts, such as the Vedanta, must have to be about either religion or philosophy? Is there a third possibility?

Reference

[1] *Philosophy of Hindu Sādhanā* [Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1st Indian Edition, 1993], p. 4.

Some Observations on Vedanta

PANDIT SRI SRIMOHAN BHATTACHARYA

TRADITIONAL INDIAN philosophical discussions centre round, primarily, the concept of the Self. It admits of no controversy. 'My Dear, the Atman indeed is to be seen' — this text of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*[1] forms the basis of all studies centring round the Self. Udayanācārya, the eminent Indian logician, in his celebrated work *Ātmatattvaviveka*, observes that the Self is at the centre of thoughts and speculations even of those who advocate the unreality of It. Even though the goal is one, the paths leading to the goal may be numerous. Pushpadanta rightly states: 'O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.'[2] Sri Ramakrishna proclaims this in his simple, inimitable way: 'As many faiths, so many paths.' The *Gita* also strikes the same note: 'Whosoever worships Me through whatsoever path, I verily accept and bless him in that way.'[3]

Vedanta, the culmination of Indian philosophical thought, contains different schools of thought such as dualism, qualified monism, non-dualism, etc., formulated as they are from the standpoints of action, devotion, and knowledge. Although at present the names of well-known teachers like Ācārya Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva are associated with the abovementioned doctrines, being their propagators, these can be traced back to the hoary past. Aphorisms 20-22 of the fourth section of the first chapter of the *Brahma Sūtras* refer to three ancient teachers — Āshmarathya, Audulomi, and Kāshakritsna. They bear evidence to the fact that in the past too there was a difference of opinion about the relation between the individual self and Brahman, the Supreme Reality.

Yamunacarya, Ramanuja's preceptor's preceptor, was a well-known figure. In his *Śrī Bhāṣya*, Ramanuja mentions the annotator Bodhāyana as his predecessor. Even before the advent of Ācārya Shankara, the exponent of pure non-dualism, there were teachers like Govindapāda, Shankara's preceptor; Gaudapāda, his preceptor's preceptor; Brahmānandi, the annotator of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*; Mandana Mishra, Upavarsha, and Dravidācārya.

All the Indian systems of philosophy, except Advaita Vedanta, are, in fact, dualistic in their approach to Reality. They, with the exception of other Vedantic theories, mainly adopt logical methods of reasoning in propagating their views. Of course, dualism is not foreign even to the Vedanta philosophy, as we find such different theories within the Vedantic fold. These dualistic theories show their allegiance to some Puranic declarations in addition to *Śruti* passages. The following is a brief description of them.

Dualism (*Dvaitavāda*)

The Sanskrit word for dualism is *Dvaitavāda*. The word *Dvaita* means 'difference'. Right from our birth we become aware of our own existence and that of things and people around us. Furthermore, we seek peace and happiness by resigning ourselves to an omnipotent and omniscient Supreme Being when we find ourselves helpless, realizing our limited power and knowledge. Therefore, in a sense, we are all dualists.

Generally speaking, the difference which is natural to dualism can be fivefold:

- Difference among individuals. Since birth, death, happiness, misery, activities, knowledge, capacity, etc. vary from person to person, we must admit that individuals are not all alike.
- Difference between individuals and the inert universe. The individual is a sentient being while the universe is insentient. The individual is the experiencer, the universe the experienced. Under no circumstances can they be identical.
- Difference between two insentient objects. One jar is distinguishable from another jar, a jar from a piece of linen, etc.
- Distinction between an individual and Īshvara, the Supreme Lord. Īshvara is omniscient and omnipotent while an individual's knowledge and

power are both limited. Īshvara is the worshipped, the individual, a worshipper. Īshvara is the paramount Lord who guides and controls an individual, who is His servant.

- Difference between the insentient universe and Īshvara. Īshvara is the Conscious Creator of the universe.

This fivefold difference is a fact which everyone must acknowledge, no matter who he is — a philosopher or a layman. As long as we are interested in this ephemeral universe and feel ourselves a part of it, who can deny his personal existence and the universe he is living in? Madhvacarya, further known as Pūrnaprajna or Ānandatīrtha, endeavours to show that, like the Nyaya-Vaisheshika systems, the spiritually-oriented Vedanta philosophy also, in fact, propagates dualism. Madhvacarya was born in the last part of the twelfth century. He commented upon the Upaniṣads, *Bhagavad Gita*, and *Brahma Sūtras*, and put forth a dualistic interpretation of them. Jayatīrtha, Vyāsatīrtha and others played an important role in spreading the gospel of Madhva. Their works bear ample testimony to the deep scholarship they had not only in their own creed but in other systems like Nyāya and Advaita Vedanta.

This dualism advocated by Madhva further goes by the name *Svatantrā-svatantravāda*, or the theory of independent and dependent principles. Brahman, i.e. Īshvara, alone is independent or sovereign. The universe and individuals are dependent and ruled by Him. In their view, the Mahavakyas, or the cardinal Vedic dictums, do not proclaim complete identification of the individual self and Brahman. The Mādhvas rather interpret those propositions in a peculiar way so as to suit their own viewpoint. As for example, the terse statement *tattvamasi* would mean 'You are His', i.e. of the Lord, or 'You are an offering to Him', or 'You are held or sustained by Him' and so forth.

The jīva, or individual self, according to them, is atomic, whereas Lord Vishnu is Brahman or the all-pervading Īshvara.

Qualified Monism (*Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda*)

Ramanujacarya (11th century AD) believes and tries to prove that the significance of Vedanta lies in qualified monism. He does not accept the Shankarites' claim that it is pure non-dualism that Vedanta teaches. The upholders

of qualified monism, however, like the dualists, are of the opinion that the universe, like Īshvara, is real, and Īshvara with attributes such as omnipotence, etc. is Brahman. Īshvara, who constitutes the whole, possesses the living beings and universe in his bosom and is said to be absolutely one without a second. In their parlance, the living beings are *cit* and the material Universe is *acit*. Īshvara stands in relation with the *cit* and *acit* as the Soul with the body. As the body cannot live without the Spirit, which is the master, so the universe and living beings pale into non-entities if unassociated with Īshvara. Īshvara qualified by *cit* and *acit* is the supreme Truth. How this relationship between Īshvara and *cit-acit* is possible has been demonstrated by Meghanādāri Sūri in his work *Nayadyumani*. But admission to such a relationship is, in fact, a tacit consent to the theory of *Bhedābheda* — difference and non-difference — because the doctrine of Viśiṣṭādvaita cannot be sufficiently proved without showing allegiance to *Bhedābheda*. But, as a matter of fact, Ramanuja, the greatest exponent of the Viśiṣṭādvaita school of thought, was unrelenting in repudiating this theory. Hence the qualified monists are nicknamed 'crypto-dualists' by the Advaitins. Because of his postulation of *cit*, *acit* and Īshvara, Ramanuja is sometimes branded by some as 'the upholder of three principles'. In that case, how he can claim monistic heritage is a point to ponder.

Kāshmīra Shaivism (*Shivādvaitavāda*)

Ācārya Shrīkantha was one of the exponents of Kāshmīra Shaivism. He composed *Shrīkantha Bhāṣya*, a commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras* (c. tenth century AD), which reflects his view. Though claiming a monistic identity, truly speaking, Shrīkantha cannot belong to the genuine Advaitic fold. He may at best be called a casual non-dualist who considers Shiva to be the ultimate principle associated with His power, Shakti. The benedictory verse with which he opens his work is a pointer to this fact. There Shrīkantha observes: 'He who is possessed of all-encompassing power, a fragmentary part of which manifests as this universe, I offer my salutations to Him who is ever-united with Nārāyanī, His power; whose neck is shiny black like the dark leaves of a tāmala tree.' Appayya Dīkshita, a follower of the pure monism taught by Ācārya Shankara, wrote an annotation to Shrīkantha's commentary. His gloss, however, contains the exposition of Shaiva monism, since traditionally he belonged to that fold.

This traditional association actually prompted him to compose *Śivārkamaṇi-dīpikā*, the gloss on Shrīkantha's commentary. It is quite interesting to note that in the prelude he comes clean about it. There he remarks:

> Even though the scriptures like the Upaniṣads, Shaivāgamas, Smṛtis, Purāṇas, and the *Mahabharata* proclaim in reality absolute monism, and renowned philosophers of the past such as Ācārya Shankara and others have lent credence to it, it is by the grace of Mahadeva, in whose crown shines the crescent moon, that the Advaita leanings arise in one. This is why Shrīkantha has written this excellent commentary in order to ascertain this truth that the significance of the Vedanta lies in Brahman with attributes.

Even in the works of Advaita Vedanta there are copious references to this fact that one can have no access to the realm of Advaitic realization until and unless one has made necessary preparations for it by worship and meditation on Brahman with attributes. In many places this point has been discussed and authenticated by the Upaniṣadic texts. The Vedic texts have been divided into two sections: one dealing with karma, i.e. rites and ceremonies, and the other with jñāna or spiritual knowledge. Actions like daily obligatory, occasional, and expiatory rites, and meditation are all solely meant for purification and concentration of the mind. *Naiśkarmyasiddhi* says,[4] 'The actions having generated in the mind through its purification the inclination towards the Self, and having fulfilled their purpose thus, disappear like the clouds after the rainy season.' The *Gita*[5] also conveys the same note when it says: 'For one who desires to ascend the path leading to the heights of spiritual communion, detached work is the means. For one who has ascended it, quiescence is verily the means.' 'O Arjuna, all works without exception culminate in knowledge.'[6] We cannot get rid of actions unless they drop off themselves; they will manifest invariably through our body, mind, and speech even if we eschew them. The *Gita* further says: 'By renouncing actions, *naiśkarmya* or actionlessness cannot be obtained.'[7]

Non-dualism (*Advaitavāda*)

The monistic philosophy propagated by Ācārya Shankara (eighth century AD) is called non-dualism. It gets this name because this system preaches

Brahman, or the Ultimate Reality, as Pure Spirit, which is entirely free from all characteristics and associations. It does not admit of any distinction in Brahman. Differences are of three kinds:

- Difference in species (*sajātīya*)
- Difference in genus (*vijātīya)*
- Internal differentiation (*svagata*)

Because of maya, or nescience, this threefold difference is thought to be existing in Brahman. Both the individual selves and Īshvara are essentially Brahman. Their respective adjuncts of maya and avidyā are imaginary and therefore false. The insentient universe is also false, being the transformation of maya which is its cause.

In his *adhyāsa-bhāṣya*, or introduction to the commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras*, Shankara comments: 'Different proofs such as perception etc., and even the scriptures, refer to those who are unaware of the supreme Truth.' Echoing this, Madhusudana Saraswati, in the beginning of his magnum opus, *Advaitasiddhi*, says that Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, is the substratum of this multiple universe which is false and consists of imaginary objects and beings such as knower, known, means of knowing, etc. Further, Brahman is the import of the unitary awareness arising from such cardinal Vedic dictums as 'That thou art', 'I am Brahman', etc. This opening verse, in fact, presents the gist of non-dualistic Vedanta.

The Upaniṣadic texts like, 'Verily that from which all these beings originate',[8] 'Having created this universe, It has entered into it',[9] 'From the Self evolves *ākāśa*',[10] etc. describe the creation of this universe. Again, the passages like 'There is no difference whatsoever in it'[11] etc. discount the abovementioned view of creation. According to Advaitic teachers, the contradiction aired here actually suggests that the significance of the passages dealing with creation is diferent from what it is thought to be. These passages conveying mutually exclusive ideas, in fact, tacitly introduce the Vedantic method of superimposition and de-superimposition. Here the Upaniṣadic seers, in order to make the abstruse Vedantic ideas intelligible, at first imagine the creation of the ephemeral universe upon Brahman, the Reality. And then pointing out the unreality of the universe, they teach pure non-duality of the Reality. In this context the following observation of Swami Vivekananda is pertinent:

> ...Advaitism, the last and, what we think, the fairest flower of philosophy and religion that any country in any age has produced, where human thought attains its highest expression and even goes beyond the mystery which seems to be impenetrable. This is the non-dualistic Vedantism.[12]

Of the theories of causality, Advaita Vedanta shows its allegiance to *Vivartavāda*, or the doctrine of false appearance. The Advaitins do not admit any effect or product independent of its cause. What is said to be a product is, in fact, a fanciful conception and consists of mere name and form. This *Vivartavāda* has been thoroughly dealt with in Ācārya Shankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras* (2. 1. 14): *Tat ananyatvam ārambhaṇa śabdādibhyaḥ*, 'There is non-difference of cause and effect on account of the texts about origin etc.' Vācaspati's exposition of Ācārya Shankara's commentary on this particular aphorism is quite illuminating. Brahmananda Saraswati, in his gloss on *Siddhāntabindu*, refers to this in his bold assertion: 'The Advaita Vedantins are apathetic about the cause-effect relationship.'[13] Since *Vivartavāda* denounces all effects as false, it, in fact, dismisses the law of causality. In this connection what Gaudapāda says deserves mention:

> An existing entity cannot come into existence, nor can a non-existing entity come into existence. Thus disputing among themselves, they really establish the non-dualistic view of *ajāti* (non-creation). We approve the *ajāti* declared by them. We have no quarrel with them.[14]

Different philosophical works present metaphysical truths in different ways, and our mind is quick to acknowledge those truths. This is because we are accustomed to looking upon the Truth from different standpoints. Even though difference is generally admitted by thinkers like dualists etc., so far as philosophical concepts are concerned, truly, whether or not there lies any difference is a point to ponder. When the various parts of an object are viewed separately, their usual difference come to light. As for example, it seems that every part of an earthen jar, say, its top or bottom or inside or outside, is different from other parts. But when we look upon the jar in its totality, we can hardly draw any distinction among those parts, as they are the very essence of the jar, and we say that it is one undivided jar. Hence, how we describe the Reality, dualistically or non-dualistically, depends

entirely upon our mental make-up. The Truth is most near and again It is far away.

Philosophers are world-viewers, men of broadened horizons. They have foresight and insight. With their extraordinary capacity of understanding they can survey this universe diversely and thoroughly. Different names are given to them — dualist, non-dualist, qualified monist, to name but a few. But not a single doctrine can claim to be entirely objective. The brilliant expositions of their propagators influence us in such a way that we cannot disbelieve any of their accounts. No doubt they give us directions for understanding truth. But since they are numerous and self-proving, more often than not we get confused and bewildered in the face of them all.

While seeking fervently peace and solace of mind, if we fall into the thorny disputes of different schools of Vedanta, we will have no escape from sufferings and doubts of life. In this context, Self-discovery is the only way to peace and blessedness. So 'Know Thyself' is the constant call of the Upaniṣads.

References

[1] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2. 4. 5. Hereafter *Br. Up.*

[2] *Śivamahimnah Stotram*, 7.

[3] *Śrimad Bhagavad Gita*, 4. 11. Hereafter *Gita*.

[4] *Naiśkarmyasiddhi*, 1. 49.

[5] *Gita*, 6. 3.

[6] Ibid., 4. 33.

[7] Ibid., 3. 4.

[8] *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 3. 1.

[9] Ibid., 2. 6.

[10] Ibid., 2. 1.

[11] *Br. Up.*, 4. 4. 19.

[12] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983], II: 247.

[13] *Nyāyaratnāvali* on *Siddhāntabindu* [Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1928 edn.], 128.

[14] *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, 4. 4-5.

Ramakrishna Mission
A SPIRITUAL ORGANIZATION

SWAMI TYAGANANDA

A HUNDRED YEARS may not seem a lot in the life of a world-wide movement destined to play an important role for centuries to come. But the first hundred years are certainly special because it is generally the defining period when the movement acquires an identity, its direction gets more or less fixed, its priorities are determined, and its philosophy becomes clearer.

The Mission's centenary and its stepping into the 21st century is a kind of threshold separating the past hundred years from the next. It may be an occasion for celebration, but it's more an opportunity to look back and learn from the past, and then to look forward and plan for the future. And this must be done without losing touch with the present. A centenary is an ideal time to re-examine the movement's ideals, the methods employed to achieve those ideals, and the identity the movement acquires in the process.

At this point in the history of the Ramakrishna Movement, it is important to take a look at the nature of the Movement's identity. What is this Ramakrishna Movement really and how is it perceived by others? This essay attempts to study these questions. The term 'Ramakrishna Movement' is not much in vogue. In Asian countries the Movement is popularly identified with the name of the organization called the 'Ramakrishna Mission', and in the West it is identified with the Vedanta Societies of the Ramakrishna Order. In what follows, the two words 'Movement' and 'Mission' are used almost synonymously.

One would have thought that to say that the Ramakrishna Mission is a spiritual organization is to state the obvious. But this is not so obvious to many. There is a reason for this. Take the activities this organization is famous for. What does the Ramakrishna Mission do? In India it runs schools and colleges, maintains dispensaries and hospitals, conducts relief operations and follows them up with rehabilitation projects, undertakes schemes for integrated rural development, and works among the tribal people without disturbing their native faith, culture, and traditions. With an outstanding record of one hundred years of exemplary service, the Ramakrishna Mission here can easily be mistaken for a social service organization.

Not everyone, of course, is aware of the Ramakrishna Mission's activities. Even in India, but especially in the West, there is this frequent question: 'What do you people *do*?' The Movement's work is impressive but not quite pervasive. Most of its work is so silent and free from controversies that it doesn't attract the media's attention. There is no conscious attempt made to appear in the public eye.

Moreover, the Ramakrishna Movement never takes a stand for or against the social issues of the day. It is easy to take sides in any conflict; it is difficult to remain neutral and try to understand the 'what' and the 'why' of each side's viewpoint. The Ramakrishna Movement has chosen the difficult way, because it is the *only* way to become an instrument of reconciliation, restoring peace, harmony and understanding. Rather than appreciating the harmonizing role the Ramakrishna Movement can play and is playing, some people jump to the conclusion that the Movement is either out of touch with social reality or is unconcerned with it.

Since the Movement has studiously kept itself away from politics — and most social issues today get politicized sooner or later — the general impression is that the Ramakrishna Movement is becoming socially irrelevant. Although requests for relief-work and schools are routinely received by the Ramakrishna Mission in India, seldom is it consulted or its involvement felt essential in solving some of the burning problems faced by the country.

So, on one hand, the Ramakrishna Movement looks like a social service movement and, on the other, paradoxically, it looks cut off from society. Neither of these views is correct. The Ramakrishna Movement is entirely a spiritual movement, but its spirituality is not divorced from the reality of daily life. One

of its greatest achievements is its remarkable success in resolving the familiar conflict between the aspiration for 'the world beyond' and the concern for 'the world here and now'.

How was this harmonizing of the so-called spiritual with the so-called secular achieved? How does the Ramakrishna Movement manage to work in society and yet remain *out* of it? How is the Movement able to accept social reality without getting entangled in it? To answer these questions we must look at some of the cardinal spiritual truths on which the functioning of the Ramakrishna Mission is based.

The Spiritual Solution

No problem is without a solution. Problems are of various types and so are solutions. Most solutions are quick fixes which don't solve the problems really, but merely suppress it or postpone it for a while. Is there a solution which attacks the very root of any problem and destroys it fully and irrevocably? There is — and that is the spiritual solution.

Every problem has a spiritual solution because every problem is basically a spiritual problem. The Vedas say that the one, non-dual, non-material Being-Consciousness-Bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda*) is all that existed in the beginning. There was no problem then of any kind. Somehow — no one knows how — the one disappeared and was replaced with the many, and from the non-material reality the material universe apparently emerged. Thence came problems of all sorts and at all levels of existence. The basic problem thus is the problem of the spiritual coming to think of itself as material. If this problem can be solved, all other problems may not need solving at all; they will be dissolved once and for all.

Vedanta has identified the cause of this problem as forgetfulness (*vismṛti*) or ignorance (*ajñāna*) of our spiritual nature. Only the light of Self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*) can dispel the darkness of ignorance concerning the Self.

No Religion on an Empty Stomach

Although Self-knowledge is what we need most, we also need, first of all, congenial conditions to acquire that knowledge. What are these conditions?

Fundamentally three — food, shelter, and clothing. It is only when these minimum requirements for physical survival are available that a person may get the time and even the desire to acquire Self-knowledge.

But physical survival is not the whole story. For healthy growth, a person also needs parental love and careful upbringing, good companions and wholesome habits. All these put together provide an ideal soil in which the seed of knowledge can grow.

A Dog's Tail

The world was not created the other day. It has evolved through zillions of years. Although we speak of progress, civilization, and so on, the world hasn't really changed much except on the surface. If we scratch it a little, the same old world shows through, a place brimming with fear, hatred, insecurity, confusion, guilt, greed — all these counterbalanced to some extent by instances of courage, love, faith, strength, purity, and peace.

Problems have remained much the same; they periodically change their masks, that's all. The basic problems haven't even changed their masks. Consider, for instance, the problem of fate and death, the problem of emptiness and meaninglessness, the problem of guilt and condemnation.

It is the insight into the unchanging nature of the world that made Vivekananda compare it to a dog's tail. No matter how many times we try to straighten it, it's going to remain curly. Is there any point, then, in trying to improve the world? No and yes. No, because the world cannot change its essential nature; yes, because in trying to improve the world we really improve ourselves. Swami Vivekananda said something very similar. He said that the world would continue to be a mixture of good and evil. If we look deeply we shall find that the world does not need our help at all. It can go on quite well even without us. Yet we must try to help the world because, Swamiji said, 'in helping the world we really help ourselves.'

It is not as if the world cannot be improved at all. It can be, but, one, the improvement is always temporary and, two, it is always restricted to certain regions or peoples. We won't be straightening the tail but merely cleaning it periodically. Even this cleaning the tail has some value, of course. It can at least keep the tail more or less healthy, never mind its curliness.

The Living God

The world cannot be 'straightened' for the very reason it is the world, just as a dog's tail cannot be straightened for the very reason it is a dog's tail. If we focus only on the tail, we may not see the dog at all; the tail is only a small part of the dog, and none too vital a part at that. In the same way, if we focus exclusively on the world, we may lose sight of God altogether. The Vedas tell us that the world is only a part — a very tiny part — of God.

God is too vast, too subtle for our present understanding. We may try to get some idea of God through symbols, concepts, and images and try to commune with Him through prayer, worship and meditation. Although useful, all these can yet remain abstract and unreal if we are not able to get hold of something tangible, something real, something our mind and senses can behold.

Fortunately for us, it is possible to see God here and now. After projecting this universe, God is said to have entered into every tiny bit of it. He is within all of us and He is within every thing we see around us. Every person is God in human form, a 'living God', compared to the apparently lifeless God we struggle to see in images and to comprehend through books.

Seeing the Living God within and without transforms both our inner life and outer life, our attitude towards ourselves and our attitude towards others. It spiritualizes our daily life, converting every breath into prayer and every work into worship. It was Sri Ramakrishna who revived and emphasized the ideal of seeing everyone as an embodiment of God. This ideal removes the needless tension between the spiritual and the secular, between worship and work, between the world beyond and the world here.

We have seen four important spiritual truths that have shaped the thinking and guided the working of the Ramakrishna Mission: one, ultimately there is only a spiritual solution to every problem; two, some of the basic needs for physical survival and healthy mental growth must be fulfilled before we are able to seek the spiritual solution; three, the improvement of the world is only temporary, but our selfless efforts to bring it about can produce lasting inner improvement; and four, God can be perceived here and now in every living being and worshipped through selfless service.

Spirituality in Action

It might be easier now to look again at the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission and understand better their purpose. Let us work our way backwards. First, the truth concerning the Living God. How is this reflected in the activities of the Movement? The Movement's so-called social work is, in fact, a spiritual activity because it is inspired by the effort to *see* the Living God in everyone and everything. All the service the Ramakrishna Mission does is an attempt to worship the Living God. When God comes as a hungry person, He is worshipped with food, and when He comes as the disease, He is worshipped with medicines. Shelter and protection are given to God when He chooses to come as the unsheltered and the persecuted. Schools, colleges, and centres of vocational training are provided for the student-God.

To those not familiar with the Movement's Guiding Lights — Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda — the work of the Ramakrishna Mission may look like social service, and those doing the work may look like social workers, but others know better. They know that service done as worship is an important and indispensable part of spiritual practice.

Next, the unchanging nature of the world. The awareness of this truth is most helpful. Those engaged in the Ramakrishna Mission's work are able to serve others with enthusiasm, vigour, and joy, in spite of knowing that the world is a dog's tail. They know perfectly well that the world will never be straightened out, but they also know that their effort to straighten it will straighten *them*, and remove all the remnants of crookedness from their heart. As the heart becomes more and more pure, there is needed less and less effort to *see* the Living God and worship Him. Once the heart becomes absolutely pure, God-vision becomes effortless. At this stage, all problems dissolve once and for all.

The very effort to attain that blessed state is a joyful adventure. The realization that the world will continue to be more or less the same kind of place protects people from fanaticism, despair, and frustration at not attaining much of stable, objective transformation. It also directs attention to the one place where real change is possible: *within*. And here is the secret — no sooner do I change than the world I see also changes for me. In order to make the world a better place, therefore, I must make myself a better person.

It is not only the person who serves that becomes better but even those who receive the service. Ramakrishna Mission's activities are designed to fill the 'empty stomach' so that the person will be in the right frame of mind to receive 'religion'. By catering to the basic requirements — food, shelter, and clothing — of the needy and providing facilities for education, the Ramakrishna Mission ensures that these people will have the leisure and capacity to deal with more fundamental questions such as, who am I really? What is the purpose of my existence? Whence did I come? Where am I going?

To those who are grappling with these questions, the Ramakrishna Movement provides authentic assistance through a wide range of books, facilities to practise prayer and meditation, and more importantly, through personal guidance and spiritual counselling. The spiritual work of the Movement rarely receives the attention and recognition it so richly deserves. Earnest seekers of God are encouraged to pursue the 'spiritual solution'. Innumerable people all over the world are leading lives full of peace, joy, and fulfilment as a result of the moral and spiritual nourishment provided by the Ramakrishna Movement.

Sri Ramakrishna taught that God alone exists. Everything else only *appears* to exist; it's here today and gone tomorrow. God abides forever. So the ultimate goal of life can only be God-realization or, what amounts to the same thing, the realization of our nature as Self, pure and perfect, unborn and undying. This is not a terribly new teaching, it is true, but what makes it irresistible is that Sri Ramakrishna himself *lived* true to this teaching and showed us how to build our lives on it. The Movement that bears his name is trying to translate into practice his spiritual vision to awaken the denizens of the material world.

The Motto of the Ramakrishna Mission
ĀTMANO MOKṢĀRTHAM JAGAT HITĀYA CA

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

WHILE SPEAKING to the monks at the Belur Math, Swami Vivekananda placed this dictum, *ātmano mokṣārtham jagad hitaya ca*, 'for one's own liberation, and for the welfare of humanity', as the central motto of their life of renunciation.[1] In ancient times in India, a sannyāsin was supposed to work out his own salvation. Though it was mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*[2] and other scriptures that a man of renunciation is engaged in the welfare of all (*sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ*), this idea was not central to a monk's life. Now, what is meant by liberation? Why should one be interested in the welfare of the world if it is only an illusion, maya? Will doing good to the world help one progress towards liberation? Is it really possible to do good to others? These are the questions to which we would like to get answers while trying to understand this motto of the Ramakrishna Mission.

In this context, it is pertinent to remember what Sri Ramakrishna said in regard to doing good to the world. When someone talked about it, he asked, 'Is the world such a small thing that you think you can help it?'[3] In another context, he exclaimed, 'Not *jīve dayā*, compassion to living beings, but *śiva jñāne jīva sevā*, serving jīvas looking upon them as Shiva.' When Narendranath, the future Swami Vivekananda, who was present there, heard this, he said: 'Today I have heard a great truth. If I get an opportunity, I shall preach it throughout the world.' Sri Ramakrishna has said innumerable times that the goal of human life is God-realization, which is another name for liberation. Thus we find that the basis for the motto of the Ramakrishna Mission lies in these utterances of the Great Master.

'Liberation' is understood and explained differently by different religions. Even within Hinduism, various sects explain it differently. But through all these explanations one idea shines through: that is, man should transcend the limitations imposed by Nature. Of course, transcending physical limitations is not meant by this, for that has very limited scope. But man's personality, which is weighed down by various factors — desires of various kinds, different emotions, etc. — would like to be released from them. Swamiji says: 'Man is man so long as he is struggling to rise above nature, and this nature is both internal and external.... It is good and very grand to conquer external nature, but grander still to conquer our internal nature.'[4]

The Hindu believes that through moksha or liberation, one would transcend nature and be freed from the chain of births and deaths. This is attained by knowing or realizing one's own true Self and merging in the Supreme Truth. The dualists would say that one attains eternal proximity to God. In fact, there are as many ideas of liberation as there are religions and sects. As long as man is unable to conquer the problems of life and death, belief in an after-life and attaining a state that is beyond life and death is inevitable. Let us have a brief look at the different concepts of liberation according to major world religions.

Liberation according to Major World Religions

According to Bhagawan Buddha, Nirvana is the highest goal of life. Nirvana is cessation of false individuality, desire and suffering, and attainment of the transcendental state of consciousness. It is beyond all limitations and changes, beyond 'is' and 'is not', and so it is indescribable. Becoming one with this highest intelligence or *bodha* is the goal of life. Buddha put the greatest stress on self-effort. 'Look not for refuge in anyone except in yourself. Work out your own salvation through diligence.' However, the Mahayana Buddhists of later years believed in the Bodhisattva ideal. The Bodhisattva appears in every age and helps people to attain salvation.

According to Judaism, developing a clean heart and the right spirit and enjoying the presence of God is salvation. In Christianity salvation is the restoring of man to God's fellowship which has been broken by the sin of the first man. This is to be attained through the grace of Jesus Christ. Of course, different denominations of Christianity explain it differently. According to

some, not all souls are saved. Some are lost forever. The Universalists hold, however, that no soul is ultimately lost. The Roman Catholics believe that 'there is no salvation outside the Church', while the Protestants think that salvation is God's gift to man. But the Christian mystics have a deeper conception of salvation — a unified vision. They say that salvation is attained through the soul's union with the Divine Spirit.

According to the Islamic view, there is no salvation outside Islam. The *Koran* presents an attractive picture of Heaven. However, the Sufi mystics do not take these descriptions of Heaven literally. They conceive of salvation as union with the Supreme Spirit.

The Hindu View of Liberation

All sects of Hinduism believe that the soul is eternal and pure. According to almost all of them salvation is possible through selflessness, self-analysis, and meditation. The Sāmkhya system believes that salvation lies in freeing of Purusha, the Pure Spirit, from Prakriti, matter. According to the Yoga system, salvation comes through self-knowledge. In Viśiṣṭādvaita, qualified non-dualism, God is considered as the Soul of all souls, and the highest realization is the experience of an intimate relationship (*sāyujya*) between God and the soul, both of which are eternal.

In Advaita Vedanta, the so-called individual soul is one with the Supreme Spirit or Brahman. One feels oneself to be a miserable individual due to ignorance — *avidyā*. When this ignorance vanishes due to right knowledge, one is established in Freedom, the Paramātman, free from all bondage. In the higher stages of this realization, the aspirant attains not only the transcendental vision of God, but feels His presence everywhere. Brahman is both immanent and transcendent. There is nothing but He, who is inexpressible. He is neither man nor woman nor any corporeal being. He is beyond words and thought. By attaining this Supreme realization, one is freed forever. Swamiji's concept of liberation is not something negative. Following the Vedantic idea, he says:

> Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest the Divine within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this by work or worship, or philosophy or psychic control, by one or more or all of these — and be free. This is the whole of religion.[5]

Thus, one may say that freedom is the watchword of Swami Vivekananda — freedom from all bondages — bondage of the body, bondage of the senses, bondage of the mind and the intellect. Weakening mysticisms have no place in his religion. Strength, strength — physical, mental and spiritual — is the gospel of Swami Vivekananda. Therefore, when he says *ātmano mokṣārtham*, he means all this and more. Man has to become God — nothing less. Break all bonds and realize that you are the Absolute — eternal, pure, awakened, and free.

Now, realization as described above cannot be in isolation. One has to work for the moksha of all if one is to attain liberation for oneself. Thus *jagad-hita* (doing good to the world) follows as a consequence. One who is liberated is interested in the welfare of all, *sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ* — as the *Gita* says.

How are we to work for the welfare of all? Does this not strengthen our egoism and act as a bar to moksha? Here is where the *Gita's* concept of *niśkāma-karma*, selfless activity, comes in. Selflessness is the basis of all true spiritual practice. If spiritual practice does not make one selfless, it is a fruitless exercise. By constantly working for others selflessly, one conquers this little lower self, *kācā-āmi* (the unripe self), as Sri Ramakrishna calls it, and becomes established in the *pākā-āmi* (the ripe self).

Is it really possible to do good to the world? What really is the meaning of 'doing good'? It has been said that by doing good to others, we do good to ourselves. What is meant by this? Swamiji says that one should take man from where he stands and give him a lift. In fact, all are travelling towards that Supreme Goal, consciously or unconsciously. We travel not from error to truth, but from lower truth to higher truth.[6] Thus, to a hungry man God comes in the form of a loaf of bread, as Swamiji says. All beings are at different stages of evolution — physical, mental, and spiritual. Helping them climb up to the next step is the real help that can be rendered to others. Thus service to fellow beings is on three levels: *anna-dāna*, *vidyā-dāna*, and *jñāna-dāna* — help with food and medicines, help through education, and spiritual help. These are the three kinds of service Swamiji envisaged for the purpose of doing good to the world — *jagad-hita*. Through selfless service of this kind the mind is purified and becomes fit for the highest realization, which is true knowledge leading to freedom. Therefore, in a sense, one may say that the motto of the Ramakrishna Mission represents only one ideal, that of moksha,

liberation or freedom for all — not freedom to harm others, but to realize one's untainted Self which is one with all that exists. This is the *sarvātma-bhāva*, oneness with all, mentioned in the Upaniṣads.[7]

One may ask: 'Well, this is indeed a new interpretation of Vedanta. But has this idea caught up with the monastic communities in India as well as the general public during the hundred years of Ramakrishna Mission's existence?'

The answer is yes and no. The various monastic communities in India today do accept, in a way, service to humanity as a component of monastic life. But it has not been taken up on a large scale. As regards the general public, we may say with confidence that the idea of service to suffering people has been not only accepted, but it has been an inspiring motive for many of the welfare activities taken up by various non-governmental voluntary organizations in India. Moreover, when there is any natural calamity or human suffering on a large scale, the people of India, even ordinary wage-earners, come forward to help in alleviating the suffering through generous donations and other means. Thus, though moksha or mukti is the central idea of all religious sects of Hinduism, selfless service is accepted today as a form of religious practice.

We may add that *ātmano mokṣārtham jagat hitāya ca* is a universal motto that can be applicable to all people everywhere. For it elevates a human being from his animal existence to a truly human level, and thence to Godhood.

Therefore, we find that Swami Vivekananda has placed before the sannyāsins and lay devotees of the Ramakrishna Mission the highest spiritual ideal, which can inspire men and women all over the world.

References

1 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama], VI: 512 & V:261. Hearafter *CW*.

2 *Bhagavad Gita*, 12.4.

3 *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math], II: 605.

4 *CW*, II:65.

5 Ibid., I:257.

6 Ibid., IV:371 & V:202.

7 Vide *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.4.10.

Ramakrishna Mission
ITS GOSPEL OF SERVICE

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA

The Beginning of a New Movement

On SATURDAY, 1 May 1897, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Swami Vivekananda called a meeting of all the monastic and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and founded the Ramakrishna Mission. This historic moment marked the initiation of a new spiritual movement, the vibrations of which were to be felt in different parts of India and abroad. For the first time, a new order of Hindu monks and lay devotees became organized under the banner of practical Vedanta. The only other instance of an organized monastic order in the history of India was that founded by Buddha. The founding of the Ramakrishna Mission set in motion for the first time the wheels of practical Vedanta, 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many.'

For centuries Hindu monks had retreated from the arena of the world, despising it as an abode of sorrow and a framework of delusion, and had isolated themselves behind walls of mystery. In the pursuit of personal salvation, they had retired into forests and mountain caves and practised untold austerities. The knowledge they gained they fiercely preserved among themselves, lest it should be misunderstood by the masses. As a result, spiritual leadership fell into the hands of corrupt priests, idle philosophers, and callous theologians. The original teachings of Vedanta were lost or compromised, and in their place, superstition, occultism and fatalism became rampant. Hindu philosophers and theologians, adept only in speculation, refused to acknowledge reality.

Like misty, shadowy figures they walked, as it were, on and off a stage uttering bromides about happiness and self-fulfilment, while the stage itself was on fire. With their limited vision, they perceived Brahman as a distant, cold Reality, indifferent to human concerns. They turned a deaf ear to the cries of agony around them and a blind eye to the humiliation and degradation of the masses of people. Human suffering was callously attributed to the inexorable law of karma, with no remedy. By founding the Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Vivekananda ushered humankind in a new era of optimism and hope. Inspired by his stirring words and his shining example, hundreds of new monks sprang forth to make the ideal of practical Vedanta a universal reality. The Swami declared as the motto of the Ramakrishna Mission: 'For one's own liberation and for the good of the world.'

Since the day of the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission, more than one hundred years have passed. The Vedanta of the forests and the mountain caves has come to the towns and villages of India at the call of Swami Vivekananda. The Movement has grown in stature and gathered momentum. Today (2006) there are 163 centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission all over the world. The Mission conducts medical service in the form of hospitals, clinics, and mobile dispensaries; educational work in the form of schools, rural development institutes, and degree colleges; rural and tribal welfare work; relief work in times of disaster; and spiritual and cultural work, including publication of books and journals. It runs homes for the aged, orphanages, training centres for farmers and academies for the blind. It feeds the poor and the hungry and provides them with education and training to become self-sufficient. In the year 2003-04 the Mission spent approximately Rs. 136.94 crores in its various service activities.[1]

The Ramakrishna Mission today stands as a tower of hope for the deprived, poor and forgotten masses of India. Wherever in India there is famine, fire, flood, cyclone, earthquake, drought or other natural or man-made disasters, Ramakrishna monks and devotees come forward to serve the afflicted with their hearts and hands, without discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, or race.

A Difficult Task

The task was not an easy one. The idea of organization was foreign to the Hindu tradition. Hinduism has neither an official church nor an official doctrine.

A Hindu, whether a monk or a lay devotee, is extremely individualistic and independent. In the West people enjoy social and political freedom and democracy, but never freedom in matters of religion, which is highly structured, organized, and centrally controlled. In contrast, followers of the Hindu faith in India, although burdened with many customs and social restrictions, take pride in their personal religious freedom. Under such circumstances, organizing an order of Hindu monks united for a common spiritual cause was an almost impossible task. But this the Ramakrishna Mission has successfully accomplished. The Movement initiated by Swami Vivekananda, while it created a stir among the scientific-minded, drew criticism from the upholders of the orthodox monastic tradition, who saw it as a departure from the orthodox monastic ideal. Ramakrishna monks serving the poor and the sick were denounced as 'scavenger monks'. The Mission's gospel of service was regarded as a doctrine imported from the West.

The Contention of the Critics

The critics consider the gospel of service by monks of the Ramakrishna Mission to be incompatible with the monastic ideal. They offer the following objections:

- God-realization and not social reform is religion's ultimate aim. Why strive to make the world better, which is never possible? Why should a monk who has renounced the world be engaged in doing the duties of a householder? How far should a monk go to improve society? The primary identity of a monk should be as a man of God and not as a good organizer, administrator, or social worker. His vocation is world-renouncing and not world-reforming. His concern should be self-discovery rather than the woes of the world. A spiritual quest that is centred in man and not in God is, it is argued, never a strong one. Humanitarian service, although noble, often becomes a rival to and eventually a substitute for the spiritual goal. In following the gospel of service and having day-to-day contact with the world, a monk is likely to neglect his monastic vocation, his solitary journey to the shrine of his soul. Despite his reason and discrimination, he may

become tainted by the world and succumb to its temptations. He may be sucked into the currents of parochial, political and social issues, and may eventually lose sight of his monastic goal altogether.

- God must come first before doing good to the world. Throughout *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the Master never tires of repeating this. Although the Master's heart always became overwhelmed upon seeing the afflictions of people, and although he exhorted us to alleviate human suffering, his main emphasis was on being good first, that is, on God-realization. This is because no one can really do good without first being good.
- Organized religious movements too often tend to become authoritarian, dogmatic, and overstructured and discourage innovation, experimentation and freedom. While average people gain some spiritual insight and momentum through organized religion, spiritual persons of great stature become rare. By discouraging freedom and innovation, organized religions sow the seeds of their own decline.

The Ramakrishna Mission's Gospel of Service

These critics represent a decadent orthodoxy, unable to change with the changing needs of the time. They have always opposed new ideas. They condemn honest doubt, are suspicious of free thinking, and call for unquestioning belief. Convinced of the infallibility of their conformity, they denounce any new path as an exotic adventure. Buddha was branded a heretic by the traditionalists, St. Francis and St. Theresa were condemned as unorthodox, and Galileo and Copernicus were castigated and scorned by convention-bound society. Small wonder, then, that the old orthodox Vedanta would criticize the gospel of service.

The Ramakrishna Mission's gospel of service is based on the true spirit of practical Vedanta as demonstrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. The old orthodox Vedanta emphasized, 'All this is verily Brahman', but ignored its counterpart, 'That thou art'. In search of God in heaven, the old Vedanta ignored God in the hearts of all beings. The quest for Self-knowledge made many self-centred. As a result, Vedanta ceased to be a living teaching able to inspire and transform lives. It almost became a relic of the historical past with

no significance for the future. Vedanta, it must be remembered, is not a teaching of inaction and speculation. It is a philosophy of action and inspiration. The gospel of service of practical Vedanta makes Vedanta once again alive and complete. Practical Vedanta declares that service of man is the highest worship of God, unselfishness is the greatest virtue, and self-sacrifice is the supreme austerity. Through the founding of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Swami Vivekananda gave a new orientation to Hindu monasticism. In his words: 'Unselfishness is God'; 'Selfishness is the devil incarnate in every man'; 'For the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, is the sannyāsin born. His life is all vain, indeed, who, embracing sannyāsa, forgets this ideal'; 'To be *in* the world but not of it is the true test of the sannyāsin.'[2]

The Ramakrishna Mission's gospel of service is not an exotic adventure of Swami Vivekananda. Neither is it an idea borrowed from the West. It is in keeping with the teachings of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, who inspired him and commanded him to work for the good of the world. Sri Ramakrishna himself laid the foundation of the future Ramakrishna Order of monks by giving each of his selected disciples the ochre cloth of the sannyāsin and asking them to dedicate their lives for the welfare of all. Serving God in all beings is the final word of Vedanta.

The gospel of service is more than social service or philanthropy. It is worship of the living God, shining as the indwelling consciousness in every heart. Its motto, 'For one's own liberation and for the good of the world', does not compromise the primary goal — one's own liberation. But the liberation of Vedanta calls for Self-knowledge, which cannot be attained vicariously or miraculously. Self-knowledge requires self-purification through selfless action, which includes all forms of action and not just prayer and meditation. If selfish actions create bondage of the soul, unselfish actions break the bonds. The results of selfish action must be countered by unselfish action, not merely by thoughts of unselfishness.

The gospel of service is the expression of dynamic Self-knowledge, which is radically different from the sterile Self-Realization of the old Vedanta. It maintains that Self-knowledge that chills the heart is no Self-knowledge. The yoga of action that does not reduce the ego is no yoga. The devotion that sees God's presence only on the temple altar denies God's omnipresence. The yoga of meditation that does not connect one with all is magical and mechanical.

Meditation and action are interconnected. The gospel of service is the gospel of Divine Love in action. Love of God begins by loving all as God's children. Those who do not love and serve God's children cannot love God. In the words of St. John: 'He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.'[3]

Moksha or *mukti* (liberation) of practical Vedanta comes in the wake of Self-Knowledge. This Self-Knowledge is not merely freedom from all delusion, limitation, attachment and aversion, but also rising to the level of Universal Consciousness, where one sees one's Self in all and all in one's Self, and dedicates oneself to the welfare of all. Affirming this dynamic Self-knowledge, the *Bhagavad Gita* says (VI.32):

> Him I hold to be the supreme yogi, O Arjuna, who looks on the pleasure and pain of all beings as he looks on them in himself.[4]

Knowers of the Self who dive into the inmost depths of their own souls must return to tell the world the good news of the oneness of all existence. Being good and doing good must complement each other. The gospel of service of practical Vedanta reveal the human face of God and a world that is not a framework of delusion or a gateway to hell, but an arena of God's Divine Sport. As Sri Ramakrishna says:

> It is a joy to merge the mind in the Indivisible Brahman through contemplation. And it is also a joy to keep the mind on the *Līlā*, the Relative, without dissolving it in the Absolute.[5]

While the saints work to set examples for the world, the followers of practical Vedanta work for self-purification. Self-purification is best practised in the midst of temptations and obstacles, not in a mountain cave or a forest. As an umbrella is tested in rain, a dancer on the stage, and a speaker on the platform, so also is a yogi tested in the field of action.

Only the ignorant or uninformed would regard the organized work of service as unorthodox. Although religion is a personal spiritual quest, it draws inspiration from the collective spiritual wisdom of the past, and this highlights the importance of organizations. Organized religious movements are vital for the preservation and perpetuation of spiritual teachings. Far from being antagonistic to an individual's spiritual development, a religious organization

prevents an individual from lapsing into whimsicality and license in the name of freedom. It does not discourage freedom, but channels it in the proper direction. Some of the world's greatest saints and their followers were intensely active in the service of all. The holy orders founded by Buddha and St. Francis are examples in this regard.

Vedanta must be problem-solving and life-inspiring. It must fulfill the needs not only of heaven, but also of earth. The Absolute Reality of Brahman must not deny the relative reality of the world. Material progress and peace of soul are not contradictory; material and spiritual values are complementary. Self-knowledge is not merely spiritual knowledge; it is also knowledge of nature's laws that enables us to overcome all our limitations. Self-knowledge is power. This world in all its complexities is worth saving; it is all we know and all we have.

Renunciation is giving up the world of our mind and not the world of God. It is not admiring one's distance from the world, but finding one's spiritual connection with it. Self-realization is not attained by repairing to a spiritual ivory tower and lapsing into spiritual narcissism. Unselfish activity is better than inertia (*tamas*); where tranquillity (*sattva*) is not yet within our reach, activity (*rajas*) that is spiritual is our best support. The God of the gospel of service is that God who dwells in all, believer and non-believer, Hindu and Christian, Muslim and Buddhist, agnostic and naturalist, hedonist and pragmatist. The gospel of service is a gospel of unity that rises above limitations and differences and brings all under its banner. Through the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission, mysticism has rediscovered its counterpart — spiritual humanism. Value has found its connection with virtue, morality with spirituality, knowledge with devotion, and contemplation with action.

In brief, Vedanta is meaningless if it is not practical. Religion is useless if it is not realization. *Jñāna*, or knowledge, is incomplete if it is not tested by *vijñāna*, or intimate knowledge. Renunciation is false if it does not inspire one with the spirit of service to all. As Swami Vivekananda says: 'They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.'[6]

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Practical Vedanta

SWAMI ATMAJNANANANDA

But is It Practical?

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA taught the highest principles of Vedanta in the West: the divinity of man, his oneness with all beings, and God-realization as the highest goal of life. The vast majority of his students found an irresistible appeal in his words. But since Westerners, especially Americans, are a very pragmatic people, the question was often asked of Swamiji regarding Vedanta, 'But is it *practical*?' Though the truths of Vedanta sounded wonderful to their ears, the nagging doubt seemed to remain that they were somehow too exalted to actually form the basis of one's life and that the goal of God-realization was too high to be reached by ordinary mortals.

Of course, the question regarding the practicality of Vedanta was not always such an innocent one. Often it represented a pointed barb, especially when phrased by the more zealous Christians, whose real meaning was: 'If Vedanta is so wonderful, why are the people of India starving for want of a morsel of food? How is it that foreign powers have ridden roughshod over them for the past several hundred years? Can a religion be of any value if it cannot make its followers successful, prosperous, and happy?'

Swamiji gave as many different answers to the question of the practicality of Vedanta as there were motives to the question. He did not hesitate to remind those who felt that Christianity occupied a special place in the pantheon of religions that the plight of India was due in large part to the exploitation of the

Christian nations of the West. He also did not fail to chide them for the notion that the worth of a religion was to be judged by the size of the bank account of its followers. Of course, Swamiji also lamented the deplorable condition of the masses in India. It was his conviction, however, that much of India's predicament was the result not of too much Vedanta, but of too little. He believed that her problems were due in large part to the fact that the teachings of Vedanta had not been universally put into practice, had not entered into the institutions and social fabric of the country, had not reached the masses, but rather had been hidden in the mountain caves of the recluses. His solution was 'Practical Vedanta'.

To those who were sincere in their question about the practicality of Vedanta, Swamiji gave quite a different reply, for he also understood 'Practical Vedanta' in a higher sense. To them he stressed the importance of going beyond a mere intellectual understanding of the philosophy of universal oneness and striving to realize it directly in one's own life. To this end he recommended not only spiritual disciplines such as meditation, japa and study, but also a new kind of Karma-yoga which emphasized worshipping God through serving mankind.

Are Our Actions Consistent with Our Beliefs?

One of the best ways to check if we are consistent and sincere in our beliefs is to see to what extent we translate our ideals into practice. Swami Vivekananda often deplored the sad fact that the very people who had discovered the wonderful truth of the oneness and equality of all beings had been so slow to incorporate this idea into their own social system. For Swamiji, all privilege and exploitation not only constituted an affront to the human dignity of the soul, but also represented a basic contradiction of the truths of Vedanta.

Swamiji thus felt that for Vedanta to be practical, for it to form the foundation for all aspects of life, secular as well as spiritual, it must be translated into action. This requires, first of all, understanding the basic ideals of Vedanta, the divinity of the soul and the unity of existence, seeing the practical ramifications of these teachings, and finally making sure that all of our actions are consistent with these ramifications.

I am Divine and You are Divine

If we truly believe, as the Vedantic scriptures tell us, that we are not simply a modification of inert matter but the manifestation of pure spirit, that we were never born and will never die, that we are not merely a small wave in the ocean of *sat-cit-ānanda*, but are one with the entire ocean, then to be consistent, we can no longer think of ourselves as small, limited beings. We can no longer give way to fear, anxiety or depression. To be consistent, we must develop strength in ourselves, we must manifest joy and sweetness in our lives, since these are the attributes of the real Self which constitute our very being. This is what it means to make the teaching of Vedanta practical in our lives. Swamiji stated in one of his lectures in the West:

> Say to your own minds, 'I am He, I am He.' Let it ring day and night in your minds like a song, and at the point of death declare: 'I am He.' That is truth; the infinite strength of the world is yours.[1]

There is a second ramification of the principles of Vedanta, namely, that if we believe in the divinity of the soul and the unity of existence, we must look upon not only ourselves as divine but all beings as well. When dealing with others, we must always be aware of the fact that we are standing face to face with the Supreme Brahman in human form. This also requires of us that we treat all beings with ultimate respect, that we feel a oneness and unity with all, that we not treat anyone as a 'stranger'.

One of Swami Vivekananda's most important teachings is the direct ramification of the principle of oneness: if it is God in human form standing before us, he maintained, then serving this 'living God' represents the highest mode of worship. When we put this principle into practice, we find that all our dealings with others become transformed into spiritual practice. Our compassion for others becomes transformed into reverence. We feel it a privilege to serve others, not a mere religious duty. This worship of the 'living God' represented real practical Vedanta for Swamiji. He said:

> If this is not preaching a practical God, how else could you teach a practical God? Where is there a more practical God than He whom I see before me — a God omnipresent, in every being, more real than our senses?[2]

The worship of God in man took various forms for Swamiji, all of which combined to constitute his doctrine of social service. The raising of the masses, elimination of privilege, education of the lower classes, and equal rights for women are but a few of the ways in which the living God could be served and worshipped. Swamiji felt that such social service would be of great benefit to society as a whole and would enable the masses to benefit spiritually as well, for religion, he felt, was difficult to swallow on an empty stomach. At the same time, Swamiji was creating a new path towards liberation for those who served their fellow beings as the visible Lord in human form.

The Curse of Privilege

Swami Vivekananda was well aware that unity in diversity was the plan of nature and that, despite the fact that we are all one on the level of spirit, there is a vast difference with regard to the manifestation of power from one person to the next. Nevertheless, he could never reconcile himself to the privilege that the wealthy and well-born enjoyed over the poor and underprivileged. To him it was an affront to the human spirit, it contradicted the fact of the unity of all beings and was the very antithesis of practical Vedanta. In one of his most inspiring lectures, he said:

> ...the idea of privilege is the bane of human life. Two forces, as it were, are constantly at work, one making caste, and the other breaking caste; in other words, the one making for privilege, and the other breaking down privilege. And wherever privilege is broken down, more and more light and progress come to a race. This struggle we see all around us. Of course, there is first the brutal idea of privilege, that of the strong over the weak. There is the privilege of wealth. If a man has more money than another, he wants a little privilege over those who have less. There is the still subtle and more powerful privilege of intellect; because one man knows more than others, he claims more privilege. And last of all, and the worst, because the most tyrannical, is the privilege of spirituality. If some persons think they know more of spirituality, more of God, they claim a superior privilege over everyone else. They say, 'Come down and worship us, ye common herds; we are the messengers of God, and you have to worship us.' None can be a Vedantist

> and at the same time admit of privilege for anyone. The same power is in every man, the one manifesting more, the other less; the same potentiality is in everyone. Where is the claim to privilege?[3]

Though the Vedantic scriptures stress same-sightedness — seeing the same Self dwelling equally in all beings — Swamiji recognized a special manifestation of God in the poor and downtrodden. Serving God in the form of the suffering masses was a singular passion with Swamiji, and he even coined a special phrase, the worship of *Daridra Nārāyana*, to refer to such service. He felt that one could derive special spiritual benefit from worshipping God through the alleviation of the suffering of the masses. He declared:

> But our mission is for the destitute, the poor, and the illiterate peasantry and labouring classes, and if, after everything has been done for them first, there is spare time, then only for the gentry.[4]
>
> The first of everything should go to the poor; we have only the right to what remains. The poor are God's representatives; anyone that suffers is his representative. Without giving, he who eats and enjoys eating, enjoys sin.[5]

Equal Rights for Women and Education for All

Swami Vivekananda was a great champion not only of the underprivileged and poor but also of women. He had a clear insight into the impossibility of a society functioning in a healthy fashion without the full participation of the members of both sexes. To Swami Ramakrishnananda he wrote:

> There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.[6]

As with all his convictions, this too was the direct result of his vision of the true nature of the Self. His desire to improve the condition of women, to see them educated and made full participants in society, was simply another example of the demand he saw to put the principles of Vedanta into practice. He wrote:

> I shall not rest till I root out this distinction of sex. Is there any sex-distinction in the Atman? Out with the differentiation between man and woman — all is Atman.[7]

Swami Vivekananda saw education as the single most potent means for improving the condition of women as well as that of the lower classes in general. For him, though, education was not mere book-learning or filling one's head with facts and figures. It was a character-building education which he envisioned for India and the world, and his vision of such an education was again based on the very nature of the Self. Swamiji believed that all we need to know lies hidden in the inner recesses of the soul, it being the very image of light and knowledge. The role of the teacher was to be a mere catalyst in the process of learning. He should be like an expert gardener who prepares the soil, pulls the weeds, irrigates the field, and plants the seeds. Once that is done, the flower of knowledge will naturally bloom in its own time. As Swamiji explained:

> You see, no one can teach anybody. The teacher spoils everything by thinking that he is teaching. Thus Vedanta says that within man is all knowledge — even in a boy it is so — and it requires only an awakening, and that much is the work of the teacher.[8]

It was Swamiji's firm conviction that once the masses had access to such an education, they would be able to solve their own problems. It was never his method to try to solve others' problems for them. On the contrary, he always took the attitude that one could at best provide a certain amount of education to an individual, give him the confidence to believe in himself and in his ability to make his own decisions, and then step aside. We see this clearly in his views on the rights of women:

> Liberty is the first condition of growth. It is wrong, a thousand times wrong, if any of you dares to say, 'I will work out the salvation of this woman or child.' I am asked again and again what I think of the widow problem and what I think of the woman question. Let me answer once for all — am I a widow that you ask me that nonsense? Am I a woman that you ask me that question again and again? Who are you to solve women's problems? Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every woman? Hands off! They will solve their own problems.[9]

The Real Practicality of Vedanta

These are but a few of the examples of how the principles of Vedanta can find practical application in the social field. But we must never forget that no matter how much emphasis Swamiji placed on this type of practical Vedanta, he always understood that the real practicality of Vedanta lay in its ability to transform an individual and allow him to break through the bonds of ignorance. Thus, when asked the question, 'Is it practical?' Swamiji would more typically give the following reply:

> Practical religion is identifying myself with my Self. Stop this wrong identification! How far are you advanced in that? You may have built two thousand hospitals, built fifty thousand roads, and yet what of that if you have not realized that you are the spirit?... You must see God. The spirit must be realized, and that is practical religion.... He is the Soul of our souls. See Him in your own soul. That is practical religion. That is freedom.... Realize yourself. That is all there is to do. Know yourself as you are — infinite spirit. That is practical religion. Everything else is impractical, for everything else will vanish. That alone will never vanish. It is eternal....[10]

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4 Ibid., VI.427.

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Creativity in Work and Contemplation

PRAVRAJIKA PRABUDDHAPRANA

In the past hundred years, the Ramakrishna Mission has established a tradition. However, it does not encourage its workers to simply follow it. Each must find his or her own way to renounce the self in the service of others and in contemplation of an individually chosen ideal. It is the responsibility of each worker in the Mission to be creative in combining these two aspects of spiritual life. The Ramakrishna Mission is primarily a spiritual organization with its 163 centres throughout India and in most of the countries of the world. As an organization, it is unique in several features. The combination of work and contemplation is the hallmark of the Ramakrishna Mission, and the challenge before every one of those who work for it is the creative application of this combination. If the application loses its creativity, the individual and the Mission will deteriorate. To make this point, a few of the first women workers who were trained by Swami Vivekananda himself and who dedicated their lives to the Mission are shown in this article as exemplars.

Swami Vivekananda advised his workers that:

> We should work through yoga (concentration). In such concentration in action (*Karma-yoga*), there is no consciousness of the lower ego present. The consciousness that I am doing this and that is never present when one works through yoga. To work without motive, to work unattached, brings the highest bliss and freedom.[1]

However, to work unattached and without ego comes at the last stage of spiritual life, after the experience of *samādhi*. Sri Ramakrishna also warned:

> First see God and then talk seriously of your duties. Duty is the means and God is the end. Do not take the means for the end. Suppose you see God, will you say to him, Lord grant me schools and dispensaries and hospitals?... Hard indeed is work without attachment. It is hard in this materialistic world.[2]

The apparent contradiction is clearly resolved in the advice which Swami Saradananda gave to Mrs. Ole Bull. When Mrs. Bull's granddaughter was very ill, and her daughter was also not well enough to take care of the child, Mrs. Bull nursed the baby day and night. She wrote to Swami Saradananda complaining that she had no time to meditate. He replied to her that she should serve her granddaughter, seeing her chosen ideal in her. When she fed her, she should think that she is feeding her chosen ideal, and so on. He wrote that she should not think that this work was separate from her worship and meditation. Furthermore, if she thought it was separate, she did not understand Sri Ramakrishna at all.[3]

Service Motivated by Contemplation

Creative service is the natural potential of everyone. The motivation to serve degenerates with the sense of what one ought to do, or conforming to what others do for the sake of their approval or praise. If our freedom to work creatively and spontaneously depends upon external rewards and punishments, without further stimulation, a person becomes bored. This is the usual method of education in the world and the reason people tire of their jobs and find their studies tedious. On the other side of this, setting goals without understanding them makes a person a rigid worker. So, actually, only by *not* seeking rewards does creativity not degenerate? I admit, *initially* a reward may be an incentive.

To serve in a creative way and be free to work spontaneously requires sensitive perception of the order and structures of one's relationship to individuals, society and nature. When one strengthens the individual consciousness by the practice of concentration and meditation, one gains a sense of self in relation to others. Also, one gains self-confidence with alert attention flowing in a stream. Thus one's mental energy is not diffused.

What happens when a person has no concentration is revealed in an incident in the life of Miss MacLeod. At Belur Math, a student once went to Miss MacLeod to ask her for money. He needed thirty rupees. But when he approached her, he felt intimidated by her imperious personality. 'How much do you need?' she demanded. Her firm and loud voice unsettled him. He groped in his vocabulary for the right words and at last hesitatingly replied, 'Well, ah, thirty rupees.' She seemed to look at him sternly. Again frightened, the words tumbled out of his mouth: 'Eh, well, fifteen will do. I need fifteen rupees.' 'What!' she exclaimed. 'You come from the land where Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were born and you mean to say your mind is so feeble and indecisive, you can't be bold enough to stick to your words for two minutes?'

Miss MacLeod saw Swami Vivekananda as the embodiment of energy and courage.

Only a spiritually advanced person can work without attachment, without ego. The ego disappears only when *samādhi* is attained. Sister Nivedita, to whom Swami Vivekananda gave more time and training than to anyone else, was able to describe the experience which came to her after much struggle. Nevertheless, she accepted this experience to be the result of her guru's blessing. She wrote:

> Long, long ago, Sri Ramakrishna had told his disciples that the day would come when his beloved 'Noren' would manifest his own great gift of bestowing knowledge with a touch. That evening at Almora, I proved the truth of his prophecy. For alone, in meditation, I found myself gazing deep into an Infinite Good, to the recognition of which no egoistic reasoning had led me. I learnt, too, on the physical plane, the simple everyday reality of the experience related in the Hindu books on religious psychology. And I understood, for the first time, that the greatest teachers may destroy in us a personal relation only in order to bestow the Impersonal Vision in its place.[4]

Sister Nivedita's biographer points out that one of the reasons Nivedita could suffer privations uncomplainingly was that she saw so much suffering around her.

> Her heart always went out to others and she often deprived herself of comforts to help the needy. One day in winter, while she herself was shivering

from cold, she gave away her cloak to her servant, thinking that his need was greater than hers.[5]

During an outbreak of plague in Calcutta in 1899,

> the compassionate figure of Sister Nivedita was seen in every slum of the Baghbazar locality. She helped others with money without giving a thought to her own condition. At one time when her diet consisted only of milk and fruits, she gave up milk to meet the medical expenses of a patient.[6]

True service cannot be done without feeling, without some amount of identification with the person served. Sister Nivedita's school for Indian girls, based on the national ideal in education, was the first established project of the Ramakrishna Mission. Her writings on Swami Vivekananda, Indian traditions and religion are also among her greatest contributions to the Mission. She passionately dedicated her life to furthering national Indian education, art, science and literature. She applied intense concentration to her work. Nivedita gave the following advice to a group of people in America:

> How few are the people in the world who are fitted for great passions. A great passion seems indeed open to the very few. I think we all know how very few people do form extraordinary attachments of any sort in their lives or show extraordinary devotion to any given cause. Now, the power to really love one being or one thing with the whole weight and force of your nature, the power which we call passion, is really a natural call to concentration, is a natural power of concentration. Therefore, when you sit down to meditate, please meditate on that thing which you are most fitted for. Do not try to jump from a position where you counted everything in the concrete, right up to the abstract, to direct communion with God, and feel unhappy because you are not triumphant. That stage will come to you at the end. It will not come to you at the point where you remain occupied with hospital buildings, sanitary establishments and so on. Abstract communion, direct, intuitive, inspired knowledge of the Divine cannot come to you at the stage where the 'material' is your habit of thought. You must work through your own natural steps. And again, the thing may not eventually come to you as pure thought; it may come to you as pure feeling or it may come to you as pure motive.[7]

Two other women who were specially trained by Swami Vivekananda in meditation, who made 'great' contributions to his Mission, were Mrs. Ole Bull and Miss Josephine MacLeod. There were others whom he trained and who gave a great deal to the Mission, but I am limiting this brief article to these three as examples of the necessity for contemplative life for creative action. These extraordinary women attained great depths in meditation.

Nivedita said that when Mrs. Bull began to work for Vivekananda's mission it marked the turning-point of his American work. There were other people wealthier than Mrs. Bull who were interested in Swami Vivekananda's work, but none of them could bring such a depth of impersonal generosity and care for the ideas for which he stood. There were none with Mrs. Ole Bull's sense of responsibility and trained capacity for serving.

She brought to him and to Vedantic thinkers the best representatives of Western thinkers at conferences in her Cambridge home. It was there that Vivekananda taught his *Six Lessons on Raja Yoga*. Besides this, Mrs. Bull was a calm mother, Dhirāmātā, as Vivekananda named her, to all the workers of the Vedanta Societies which Vivekananda started. She also kept the accounts of the entire organization. Vivekananda relied upon her so much that he put her in charge of his American work and wished to make her a Trustee of his Math and Mission along with the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. The secret of her intense activity was a deeply meditative life.

Once, on a ship, Josephine MacLeod and Mrs. Bull were conversing about Swami Vivekananda. When Miss MacLeod asked Mrs. Bull a question and Mrs. Bull did not answer, Miss MacLeod looked at her attentively. Mrs. Bull had closed her eyes, and her face had all the mystery of a mask. It was serene and beautiful, but quite motionless. Miss MacLeod understood this mood, and waited quietly for her friend to come back from her trance-like meditation. It was at least ten minutes before Mrs. Bull opened her eyes. Her face had a look of immortal youth about it, and when she smiled it seemed to reflect some inner light. But she seemed not to be aware that any time had passed and continued the conversation.[8]

Mrs. Bull helped many people associated with the Vedanta Societies to ensure the continuance of the work. 'It has been my pride', said Mrs. Bull, 'to be the *servant*.' She wrote, 'I have taken no vows, but I spoke my aspirations in the presence of those who had, and asked their help and the blessings of

Vivekananda whom I reverence for the knowledge he brought me of his Master and for his own brave life towards purity and perfection.'[9]

Miss MacLeod made every effort to publish and circulate Vivekananda's teachings in various languages and countries. She used her influence with the Viceroy to intervene with the Government's encroachment on the Belur Math property and interference with its members. She encouraged many people to work for the Mission.

As a result of meditation, one can apply extraordinary insight to ordinary situations. There are many interesting and amusing examples of this in the life of Miss MacLeod, who wrote on November 27, 1927:

> Last evening...two brothers came to see me after I was tucked away behind my mosquito net, to tell me that the younger, 28 (since nine months a member of the Ramakrishna Math at Dhaka) had been one of 72 new prisoners taken by the 18th Century ordinance and had been in Dhaka jail since October 24th. Today he must give himself up to the Superintendent of Police of 24-Parganas, to be interned in the village of Haroa, Bengal, till further orders... (To be interned in a village does not mean prison walls, but not allowed to leave the village). So I had my chance of telling him what it really meant! And what he might do for India and Swamiji, whose ideal was that each village of India (over 700,000) should have a centre, one man of education, to re-create the village. So I gave him five volumes of Swamiji and told him that 'Mother' had chosen him, by the Governor and Council, to do Her work. That only five days ago the 24-Parganas had voted 100.00 rupees for health and sanitation: that I would speak to Dr. Bentley, the Director of Health of Bengal about him. So that he could be one of their lieutenants in this new scheme.... A real epoch towards health and the scheme to be under Dr. Gopal Chatterji, Head of the Anti-malaria propaganda under which we in Belur work.... To have seen those two brothers' faces change from despair to hope! Eager to begin! And saying they 'were ignorant and didn't know "Mother God" worked that way.' Simple children! Then I told them that Swamiji's definition of his own religion is 'to learn' and with that spirit go into this new village of Haroa, to learn the village's needs, to teach sanitation, English and to teach Swamiji's ideals, and to live them, and lift India![10]

Soon after Miss MacLeod began to attend Vivekananda's classes in New York, she received instruction from him in meditation. He told her to meditate on the sound 'OM' for a week and come again and tell him what she experienced. She told him that she saw a 'glow at the heart'. He encouraged her to continue that practice. She said that he used to make his students realize there was nothing secular in life. It was all holy. He instructed her to remind herself day and night of her spiritual identity. Years later a friend of hers described her meditating. She wrote:

> To have the privilege of witnessing inadvertently Tantine in meditation in the early dawn at Belur was to see an entire personality standing like a sentinel, immovable on guard. Her soul was then like that of a wonderful animal attentive to the least motion of the Master, her immobility as well as an almost invisible form, and her rhythmic breathing, were saying: 'I am here, Lord.'
>
> When Tantine meditated, she was as always, in the timeless Now as she was with every Now on all levels of her spontaneous life. Thus it was not astonishing when she rose from the position in which she meditated, she instantaneously and directly was in the present day and hour, the Karma-Yogin that she was. She would dance into my room with a suggestion, a proposal, a plan.
>
> Tantine sought out people in power with the ruthlesssness of a minister or big businessman, who would be of use to the Ramakrishna Mission. Her devotion to serve India was focused on the land that had bred Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, Bengal, land of poets, educators, reformers, scientists and saints, land of religious and poetic fervour and prophetic vision of what man is and should become....
>
> I do not think Tantine ever had any conflicts concerning decisions to take. Since she met her own freedom in Swami Vivekananda, she was at one with herself. Her steadfastness was so self-relying that she trusted her own spirituality, as it were, without reconsideration. The quiet of meditation was its source. Activity and inwardness joined instantaneously and gave her the power to adapt flexibly to even contradictory demands.[11]

Miss MacLeod declared, 'I have had no other thought in my life and heart these eighteen years [since she met Vivekananda] than Swamiji and what he stood for.'

In deep concentration, emotion, intellect and will are in harmony. One is free to act with a strong will and an uninterrupted flow of energy. The intelligence of people who do not concentrate is absorbed in the morass of obscure limitations. These unconscious obscurities are removed in a concentrated mind and free the person to act creatively. The active women of high spiritual attainment, specially trained by Swami Vivekananda a hundred years ago, are inspiring examples of ideal workers in the Ramakrishna Mission today.

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Worship in the Ramakrishna Tradition

PRAVRAJIKA SHUDDHATMAPRANA

Introduction

> THE PROCESS FOR POURING oblations in the fire is Brahman, the clarified butter for oblations is Brahman, Brahman Itself offers oblations into the fire of Brahman. He who is absorbed in action, by seeing Brahman in it, attains Brahman Itself" (*Gita*, 4. 24). The import of this verse of the *Gita* is, that whatever is done should be done by looking upon everything as Brahman, that is to say, identifying oneself with Brahman or God. His whole life becomes an act of Yajña, or sacrificial worship, in which the process of oblation, the offering, the fire, the doer of the sacrifice, the work and the goal are all Brahman. Look upon all work as a Yajña, as His worship alone.[1]

The term *worship* is often understood, especially in the Hindu tradition, in the sense of ritualistic worship of an image or symbol of God. In this type of worship, one offers to the deity flowers, sandal paste, incense, light, food, and sometimes other things, in a prescribed manner with mantras, mudras, and worship articles. But the word *worship* could also refer to singing devotional songs, chanting Sanskrit hymns, practising japam and meditation, or even just saluting an image of God. In the Christian tradition, the Sunday service is called a worship service, and it consists mainly of the congregation sitting silently, listening to a sermon and to readings from the Bible, and now and then singing hymns and saying prayers. So what is worship? It is anything we do while remembering God with love and reverence.

Ramakrishna and the Philosophy of Worship

In the Ramakrishna tradition, worship takes on a special meaning because Ramakrishna's whole life was one of worship — starting with ritualistic worship of divine images. His favourite pastime when he was a boy was to make images of different deities and worship them. Then, after receiving the sacred thread, he began to worship the family deities with great devotion and concentration. At the age of sixteen, he came to Calcutta to help his brother, who had a Sanskrit school and who also performed worship at the homes of families in the neighbourhood. To relieve his brother, Ramakrishna took over the job of worship, and he was happy to do it. Later, when he came to Dakshineswar, he started worshipping the images of Radha-Govinda, and then of Mother Kali. This is how Ramakrishna's *sādhanā* began.

Whatever doubts there may be about the efficacy of image worship can easily be dispelled by studying the life of Ramakrishna. And if there are still doubts, Swami Vivekananda's answer to the Maharaja of Alwar[2] should finish the matter once and for all. Therefore we need not go into this aspect here.

A more serious question, however, is that of worship *vis-à-vis* Advaita Vedanta. From the time of the *Gita* onwards, philosophers have grappled with the problem of reconciling the idea of a Personal God with monism. If we look through the commentaries of Shankara, we find that he 'explicitly approves the religion of devotional worship.'[3] In his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras* (I. ii. 7), in answer to the argument against the idea that Brahman could be meditated on in the heart because of its small size, Shankara says:

> ...it is possible in the case of the omnipresent One to speak of limited presence in some sense because of existence everywhere, just as a king ruling over the whole earth can be referred to as the king of Ayodhya.... That God, possessed of a set of such qualities as subtleness, is taught to be meditated there in the lotus of the heart, just as (the Lord) Hari is taught to be worshipped on a *śālagrāma* (stone symbol). A certain state of the intellect [brought about by the Upaniṣadic instruction] catches a glimpse of Him there. God, though omnipresent, becomes gracious when worshipped there. And this is to be understood on the analogy of space. Just as space, though all-pervasive, is referred to as having a limited habitation and minuteness

> from the point of view of its association with the eye of a needle, so also is the case with Brahman.[4]

Many other examples like this can be cited from Shankara's commentaries. And though some scholars cast doubts on Shankara's authorship of the hymns attributed to him [because it somehow seems to them unbecoming or demeaning for an Advaitist to write hymns to a Personal God], it is probable that at least some of them *were* written by him.[5]

Other Advaitists, such as Madhusudana Saraswati and Shridhara Swami, were devotees of a Personal God. The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* is said to have been written for the purpose of harmonizing Advaita and devotion.[6] For Shankara, the Personal God and the Impersonal Brahman 'do not stand for two different realities, but for the same reality conceived from two different points of view.'[7]

Yet, for all that, most Advaitists, including Shankara, consider devotion to a Personal God as merely a *means* to the knowledge of Brahman.

> But the world is conceived by Shankara as an appearance which rests on our ignorance. So Brahman's creative activity is not real, it is only apparent; Brahman is only *apparently* associated with creativity. It follows that God is an unreal appearance of Brahman due to its maya or power of illusory creation on the one side and our *avidyā* or ignorance on the other. The position of God is, therefore, rather precarious in Shankara's philosophy. Such a God cannot be the proper object of devotion and worship.[8]

In Ramakrishna's life and teachings, however, we find all the difficulties resolved and the tension between the Personal God and the Impersonal Absolute dissolved. As Prof. Chatterjee says:

> He [Ramakrishna] teaches that Brahman and Shakti or Kali are non-different, and the same reality which is called Brahman in its static being or state of inactivity is called Kali in the state of its sportive creative activity. This implies that God and the Absolute are the same identical reality in two different aspects or states. God is not an unreal appearance of the Absolute, nor a lower grade of reality than the Absolute. He is the Absolute itself as moving, acting and creating worlds without number, sustaining them and finally destroying them all... Such a God is not only the proper but the

highest object of man's worship. He satisfies the religious need for God who is also Absolute.[9]

This should not be understood to mean, however, that according to Ramakrishna we can attain only the Personal God. Just as Brahman has its state of *līlā*, where it creates, sustains, and destroys the world, so also does it have its state of inactivity, the *nitya*.

> ...Sri Ramakrishna's oft-repeated statement that 'Brahman is real and the world is unreal', and his assertion that this one statement leads to the highest knowledge can be justified only if we admit that for him Brahman as indeterminate is the highest reality and the Personal God is the form of Brahman's *līlā* or creative activity, which is real but not eternal.[10]

Ramakrishna used to give the example of going up a ladder step by step till one reaches the roof. In spiritual life one negates each step and goes on to the next one higher till Brahman is attained. In Advaita Vedanta this is ordinarily thought to be the end. But, interestingly, Ramakrishna's example does not stop there. In his example, once one has reached the roof one sees that the steps are made of the same material as the roof. Ramakrishna makes it clear, however, that one must actually *reach* the roof first before realizing that.

To Ramakrishna, everything is God — even *avidyā*; while for Shankara, *avidyā* is only an apparent manifestation of Brahman. As Ramakrishna says:

> God alone has become all this — maya, the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles. 'As the snake I bite, and as the charmer I cure.' It is God Himself who has become both *vidyā* and *avidyā*. He remains deluded by the maya of *avidyā*, ignorance. Again, with the help of the guru, He is cured by the maya of *vidyā*, Knowledge.[11]
>
> Still, for both Shankara and Sri Ramakrishna, realisation of the identity between self and Brahman is the final and destined goal of all individuals.... But for Sri Ramakrishna, Īśvara or the Personal God is really the creative form [*līlā-rūpa*] of Brahman. The worship of the forms of God including that of images has, therefore, a rational basis, even from the transcendental standpoint, in Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy, while it has only a practical value in Shankara's philosophy.[12]

This brings us to another point: What was Ramakrishna's philosophy? Was it Advaita or Tantra or something else? But first we might ask, did he actually have a 'philosophy'?[13] Ramakrishna's parable of the washerman and his tub of dye[14] seems to be a perfect illustration of Ramakrishna himself. To a Vaishnava he was a Vaishnava. To an Advaitist he was an Advaitist. To a Shākta he was a Shākta. To a Christian he was a Christian. Yet we cannot deny that there is something Tantric about his statements quoted above. But who will be the judge? Holy Mother once wrote to one of her disciples that Ramakrishna was an Advaitist.[15] It would seem that she would know better than anyone else.

Ramakrishna's 'philosophy' would naturally be based on his spiritual experiences. But then how much do we know of them? Moreover, to try and categorize spiritual experiences [and especially Ramakrishna's spiritual experiences] would be like trying to pack the Ganga in a cardboard box. They just cannot be catalogued, labelled, and filed away according to someone's library system. Swami Brahmananda, Ramakrishna's spiritual son, once said: 'Real spiritual life begins after *nirvikalpa samādhi*.'[16] Until we reach that state, we cannot even begin to fathom the spiritual experiences Ramakrishna had — much less categorize them.

The Worshipper and the Worshipped

The closest that human language can get to expressing what God is like is to say that God is love. Or, in other words, love is the very nature of God. This is why Ramakrishna used to say that one should worship God purely out of love. He rejected any type of worship out of fear. Nor did he like people worshipping God simply for the sake of getting something in return.

Also in the *Gita* Krishna says that 'of the four types of people who worship (or, adore) Him, the man of knowledge, who worships with steadfastness and single-minded devotion, excels.'[17] Krishna says, '[To such a person] I am very much dear, ...and he too is dear to Me.'[18] So this is not just one-sided love. All theistic religions teach that God responds to our love and prayers. In fact, Ramakrishna says that if we take one step towards God, God takes ten towards us. We actually get the better part of the deal. The Tamil saint Manikkavachakar said to Shiva:

Yourself you gave to me
me, you took to yourself
O Shankara, who indeed is wiser?
I gained endless bliss
what gained you from me?[19]

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that God is our very own, our dearest. If we pray to the Lord with a yearning heart to reveal himself to us, he is bound to come. He can't stay away. Sri Ramakrishna once said:

> Do you know how fond God is of his devotees' love? It is like the cow's fondness for fodder mixed with oil-cake. The cow gobbles it down greedily.[20]

In Hinduism, the best and easiest way to worship God is to establish a relationship with him. There are many stories of saints who felt that God was their very own mother, child, master, friend, or beloved, and God actually responded accordingly. Gopaler-ma, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, is one example. For many years she worshipped baby Gopala as her Chosen Deity. At last the Lord came to her as a helpless baby.

Sometimes, as in the case of Gopaler-ma, it seems that God becomes a slave to his devotees' love and worship. There is, for instance, the story of Tirumalisai Alvar of South India. Tirumalisai's disciple Kanikannar once incurred the wrath of the king of Kanchi by refusing to sing a song in praise of the King, and he was ordered to leave the country. When Kanikannar went to Tirumalisai and told him what had happened, the saint decided to leave also. Before going, however, they went to the temple where Tirumalisai requested Vishnu to come with them. Vishnu immediately rolled up his snake-bed and followed the two out of the city. But since the Lord was leaving, no one else wanted to stay, so all the citizens left also. The king was extremely upset over his foolishness and finally ran after Tirumalisai and Kanikannar and begged for their forgiveness. Seeing that the King was truly remorseful, Tirumalisai agreed to return and requested the Lord to do so also. All of them then went back to Kanchi.[21]

To those who worship him solely out of love, the Lord is the fulfiller of all desires. Pusalar was a very poor but ardent devotee of Shiva. It was his great desire to build a temple to Shiva, but there was no way he could get the

money to do it. At last he decided to build a temple and install Shiva in his heart through meditation. Strictly following all the injunctions of the scriptures, he mentally went through the elaborate rites and rituals for purifying the site, laying the foundation stone, and so forth. Then, day after day, brick by brick, he began building a beautiful temple. At last one day it was finished, and he chose an auspicious date for the dedication and installation of the deity.

By coincidence, the Pallava King Kadavarkon had also just completed the construction of his temple[22] and had chosen the same date for its dedication. Shiva then spoke to the King and told him to change the date as he did not wish to disappoint Pusalar. Kadavarkon was curious about Pusalar's temple and why Shiva had given preference to it over his own, so he decided to go see it. When he reached the town where Pusalar lived, however, he could not find any trace of a newly built temple. Only when he met Pusalar did he learn that the saint had built a grand temple within his own heart.[23]

Worship of God in Human Beings

When Ramakrishna's period of *sādhanā* was over, it culminated in the worship of the divine in a woman — in Holy Mother. This was the beginning of his worship of human beings. There are several instances in the *Gospel* and other works where Ramakrishna speaks of his worshipping human beings as manifestations of the divine. For example, once he said: 'I now feel for Purna and other young boys as I once felt for Rāmlālā. I used to bathe Rāmlālā, feed Him, put Him to bed, and take Him wherever I went.'[24] And again: 'Purna was born with an element of Vishnu. I worshipped him mentally with bel-leaves; but the offering was not accepted. Then I worshipped him with tulsi-leaves and sandal-paste. That proved to be all right. God reveals himself in many ways: sometimes as a man, sometimes in other divine forms made of Spirit.'[25] Sister Nivedita gives an interesting story in *The Master As I Saw Him*:

> There are many stories current amongst the monks of persons who had come to Dakshineswar during the lifetime of their Master, and being touched by his hand, went immediately into *samādhi*. In many cases nothing more was known of the visitants than this. This was notably true of a certain

> woman, who had driven to the Temple and of whom Sri Ramakrishna had said at once that she was 'a fragment of the Madonnahood of the worlds.' He had offered salutation to this guest, in the name of the Mother, throwing flowers on her feet and burning incense before her, and she, as was not perhaps surprising, had passed immediately into the deepest *samādhi*. From this, however, to everyone's surprise, it had proved most difficult to recall her. It was two or three hours before she awoke from her ecstasy, and when this happened her whole appearance, it is said, was as that of one who had been intoxicated. Much relieved that all was ending thus well, however — for it had been feared that her *samādhi* might last much longer, and her family, wherever they were, feel justly disturbed — all lent their aid to the departure of the stranger from the temple, and none had the forethought to make a single enquiry as to her name or abode. She never came again. Thus her memory became like some beautiful legend, treasured in the Order as witness to the worship of Sri Ramakrishna for gracious and noble wifehood and motherhood. Had he not said of this woman, 'a fragment of the eternal Madonnahood'?[26]

Once Ramakrishna said:

> When one actually sees his chosen ideal in man, one realizes the divine Lord. Vaishnavacharan used to say, 'When one has faith in the *Līlā* of God as man one acquires perfect Knowledge.'[27]

On more than one occasion Ramakrishna advised people who were greatly attached to someone in their family to meditate on that person as a form of God. And in at least one case, we are told, the devotee actually attained *samādhi* through this *sādhanā*.[28]

We can thus see that there is no contradiction between Ramakrishna's teachings and the philosophy of the Ramakrishna Order's service to God in human beings — provided the service is done in the right spirit, that is, in the spirit of worship. Swami Vivekananda once said to Swami Kalyanananda:

> Look here, Kalyan, do you know how I feel about it? My idea is, one side there should be a temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna for the Sannyāsins and Brahmachārins working in the Sevashrama to meditate and pray; and on the other, revolving round it, should go on the other activities of

public utility in a worshipful spirit. That is, on the one hand, deep absorption in the thought of our Lord in silence, away from the disturbances of the outside world; on the other, the fruit of this meditation and contemplation flowing out spontaneously in acts of love and compassion for every thing on earth, proving the truth of the oneness of the transcendent and immanent aspects of God as our Lord realised and preached in his life: 'It is the same Lord I see when I close my eyes and when I keep my eyes open.' This practical Vedanta is what we want; not mere theoretical Vedanta, which is of no use unless it is brought into effect in our everyday life....[29]

Swamiji was cautioning the disciple, and more so, through him, the coming generation, of the danger of forgetting, in one's over-zealousness, the real import of his message of renunciation and service.

Both Swami Kalyanananda and his brother monk Swami Nischayananda dedicated their lives to establishing the Sevashrama at Kankhal and putting Swamiji's ideal into perfect practice. In the early days, however, they were often snubbed by the other communities of monks in Kankhal who thought they were not living the true life of sannyāsa. The following story is told about them:

Once, at one of the community feasts usually arranged from time to time in honour of the sadhus by the devotees of the local monasteries, Dhanraj Giriji [the head of Kailash Ashrama and the most respected monk of the region] was the chief guest. When he arrived, he noticed that while the sadhus from every other monastery had been invited, Swamis Kalyanananda and Nischayananda had not been. On enquiry he found out that it was not just an oversight, but that they had been left out deliberately. He was furious when he heard the reason for the omission. 'What', Dhanraj Giriji spoke out in great indignation, 'You people think that you are the true paragons of virtue and the ideal sannyāsins just because you repeat parrot-like the Vedic dictum that the Jīva is Brahman? You repeat the words, but where is the realization of its truth in your lives? You do not know the two Swamis. They are the real representatives of the sannyāsa ideal. They are trying to practise actually in their lives what they preach and what you yourselves are preaching: that "Jīva is Shiva".'[30]

Dhanraj Giri then refused to eat until Swamis Kalyanananda and Nischayananda had been brought to the feast and made to sit by his side to take their meals. Swami Sarvagatananda has given the following reminiscence of Swami Kalyanananda:

> On one occasion some of us brahmachārins were going to the hospital from the monastery. The Swami [i.e. Swami Kalyanananda] met us on the way and said: 'You see, there is a temple. You go there with fruits, flowers, and offer them with prayers and hymns. There, on the other side, you see the hospital. You go there to the patients with medicines, food, and some kind and comforting words. These two deeds are not different, they are the same. If you think they are contradictory, you may go home and do whatever you like. To me, both are spiritual acts leading to the same goal.'[31]

Spiritual *sādhanā*, if done properly, with concentration, devotion, earnestness, and steadfastness, normally produces some result, some spiritual experience — such as a vision of God. If one meditates on a certain aspect of God, one would expect to have a vision of that aspect of God. Now, the question arises here: What kind of spiritual experience does this *sādhanā* lead to? How can you have a vision of God when you are serving perhaps multitudes of people as God? Two instances are given below. The first is a description of the spiritual state of Swami Brahmananda written by Swami Satprakashananda:

> He [Swami Brahmananda] loved all, he mixed with all, he had an interest in everything; yet his mind soared far and beyond. Perchance, to describe the indescribable, things floated in his consciousness not as bubbles of no worth, but as manifestations of the same Reality. He viewed things neither in the grossness of limited forms nor in the homogeneity of pure existence. With name and form he realized the infinitude of each. Thus, though living apart as a spectator, he had an ineffable love and sympathy for all.[32]

In *For Seekers of God*, Swami Shivananda at one time[33] describes a state which is similar to Swami Brahmananda's above. But on another day he relates the following experience:

> As soon as people come in front of me, I get visions of different gods and goddesses; and so I salute those deities. When somebody approaches

me, first of all I see that particular effulgent form of God through which He reveals Himself in that particular personality. The persons themselves appear indistinctly like shadowy beings, while the divine aspect itself appears vivid and living. That's why I make my obeisance. The divine forms disappear after my salutation, and then only can I see the human figures distinctly and recognize them as well.[34]

Worship of Sri Ramakrishna

It's not for nothing that I worship Ramakrishna
He's the kind boatman taking me across this ocean without shores,
he's my life.
My best friend, he found me
before I found him.
I may do wrong again and again;
he will never desert me.
Whatever I ask he readily grants.
He's always with me, watching
lest I am in trouble.
I can't understand: Who is the
master and who is the servant?
He is my dearest, caring for me
like I am his life.
There is none like my Ramakrishna,
none so kind, so helpful.[35]

So far as the record goes, Sri Ramakrishna left no instructions for installing his image and offering worship, food, and other things to him [though he did tell Holy Mother that his picture would some day be worshipped from house to house]. Swamiji once said: 'He [Ramakrishna] never instructed me to introduce any rites of his own worship.'[36] Ramakrishna's disciples introduced these things in his honour. Swami Ramakrishnananda especially was particular that Ramakrishna's relics be faithfully worshipped, but other disciples also joined in the worship. And both Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda wrote Sanskrit hymns to be used in the worship services. Though Ramakrishna never

gave his disciples instructions on his worship, he did, during his last illness, instruct some disciples to meditate on his form. His principal instructions were on concentration and meditation, japam, and devotion, and he particularly emphasized purity and renunciation. According to Swamiji, 'To act according to the Master's teachings is itself the proper way to honour [worship] him.'

Swami Vivekananda also never felt it necessary that people should accept Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God. When he returned to India from the West, one of his brother disciples asked him why he had not preached Ramakrishna to the Americans [Swamiji rarely spoke about Ramakrishna in his public lectures in the West. Except for one or two occasions, he only spoke about him in private classes to his close friends and disciples]. Swamiji replied that if he had tried to publicly preach the divinity of Ramakrishna, the Westerners would only say, 'Well, we have our Jesus Christ.' But by preaching the message of Vedanta, they would say, 'Where is the person who has realized all this?'[37]

Yet when Swamiji came back to India he made all the work of the Ramakrishna Order centre around the worship of Ramakrishna. Some of his more Westernized admirers were quite surprised and disappointed. They thought Swamiji was more 'enlightened' (i.e. Westernized) than that. 'The teachings are enough. Why add this worship of his guru?' They thought.

Swamiji understood, however, that for a world teacher like Ramakrishna, his life *is* his message. When we know his life, then we can understand his teachings better. And more importantly, we then get more power to put the teachings into practice. For the teacher himself adds the power through his own practice and then passes this on along with the teaching.

Some people may say that the story of Krishna teaching Arjuna the *Gita* on a battlefield was only an allegory, and it didn't really happen. Maybe they are right. Yet think of the power and influence that the *Gita* holds even today. Only someone who could put such teachings into practice in such a situation could have taught it. It is the context that makes it so relevant.

Similarly, through his life and spiritual practices Sri Ramakrishna instilled power into what he taught. For instance, other saints and sages taught that all religions are paths to the same goal, but Ramakrishna actually realized it, practised it, and lived it. This is why we see the world-wide reforms that are going on in the different religions today. Whether we accept Ramakrishna as an Avatar or not — whether we even know about him or not — if we follow the same

teachings, we will make quick progress. But those who know Ramakrishna's life and also follow his teachings have an advantage, and this is why Swamiji made the activities of the Ramakrishna Order centre around the worship of Ramakrishna. Swamiji Yatiswarananda once wrote to one of his disciples:

> A tremendous Divine Power is working for the good of mankind. Through your spiritual practice come directly in touch with that and grow in spirituality and also in the spirit of service.[38]

Ramakrishna's *sādhanā* was for the good of others, so our own *sādhanā* is made easier. We reap the benefits of his spiritual practices.

But is this the only reason? Ramakrishna is devotedly worshipped by people all over the world today. Why? We could say it's because his message is so relevant and universal. Yet that can't be the only reason. Actually, as one Western devotee put it, 'It's not explainable in a rational manner.' One can only grasp it in one's own heart. But, as any Western devotee knows, 'it's not for nothing that we worship Ramakrishna.' There has been more than one instance where a Westerner, without any previous contact with a Ramakrishna Mission Centre, has simply walked into one of its American Centres, and that was it. They knew they had found everything they were looking for. How they knew it they couldn't explain. But somehow they knew it.

For thousands of years saints and sages have tried in different ways to explain the unexplainable — what God means to them and how they worship and meditate on him. Very often they have done it through hymns and poetry, because that is the medium best suited for expressing such ideas. Though many people find such writings incomprehensible, the world's most beautiful hymns and poems have been the result of just such attempts to put these experiences into words.

One such hymn was written in Sanskrit by Swami Abhedananda and is used in the formal ritualistic worship of Ramakrishna. The hymn and its meditation are recited after the worshipper has purified the offerings, vessels, and other things, and then his own body, organ of speech, and mind. It comes just before the *mānasa pūja*, or mental worship, of Ramakrishna.

> Om. You are in the lotus of my heart. You are always the same, beyond all distinctions [such as] existence and non-existence. You are devoid of

any distortion of your original nature, and you are always the embodiment of joy. We worship that pure Supreme Self, Ramakrishna.

You are unique and very subtle, and you are not associated with the five elements [i.e., you are formless]. You are desireless, and you are like the sky. You are the indwelling Lord of all beings, yet you are without the three qualities [of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*]. You are Existence and Knowledge Absolute and one with Brahman. You are the adorable one. We worship that pure Supreme Self, Ramakrishna.

You incarnated yourself to distribute knowledge, devotion, peace, and love, because your heart was moved and you were unable to bear the sufferings of men and women. Ecstasy was natural to you, who have a soft and shining body. We worship that pure Supreme Self, Ramakrishna.[39]

You are in the lotus of my heart. Spiritual teachers have for thousands of years advised their disciples to meditate on the divine in the heart. As we saw earlier, Shankara soundly refuted the arguments of those who tried to say this was impossible. But why the heart? One must not think by 'heart' that this means the physical mass of flesh that is pumping out blood. Rather, it means the region of the heart. Here 'the seeker comes to feel the point of contact between the individual consciousness and the cosmic Divine Consciousness.'[40] As Swamiji Yatiswarananda once wrote:

> The point of consciousness that we feel in the region of the heart where we have reaction of our emotions is a part of the Infinite Consciousness which you may liken to Light. To give another analogy, the heart is like a landing stage on the stairway to a flat, through which we contact the Infinite Consciousness. There is a plane of consciousness corresponding to the heart in which the devotee sees the holy forms.[41]

You are always the same. Most of our misery comes from the fact that nothing in this world remains the same. Everything changes — even our own family and friends. There is nothing and no one we can hold on to. Whenever we get the slightest bit of joy, it is soon gone. The Buddhists say that both happy and unhappy experiences cause pain. We can understand why an unhappy experience causes pain, but how can a happy experience cause pain? Because

the whole time we are experiencing it we know in our heart it will not last, and that very knowledge of its transience causes us pain. Will nothing give us joy? Vedanta says that only the realization of God can give us the joy we are seeking. He alone is eternal. In him alone is true peace and bliss.

The embodiment of joy. Swami Saradananda once described the first time he saw the Master dancing in ecstasy: 'It appeared as if the dance was the dynamic bodily expression of the surge of Bliss, the Reality of Brahman, which the Master was experiencing within.'[42]

You are without the three qualities [of sattva, rajas, and tamas]. Sri Ramakrishna used to describe the three *guṇas* — *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* — as three robbers. They steal everything from us — not only the bliss of Brahman but also our power of reasoning and discrimination. Though Ramakrishna himself never had to suffer from the bondage of the *guṇas*, he never forgot what suffering it was for ordinary people and how their suffering sometimes led them to do things they shouldn't. For instance:

> When Sri Ramakrishna was kicked by the jealous priest who wished to extract his 'secret of magic power over Mathur Babu'..., he said of it later something even higher than Christ's 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' ...He said: 'It was my fault, that I could not make him understand' [that he had no magic formula].[43]

You are the adorable one. There was an old man in the village [of Kamarpukur, Ramakrishna's birth place] named Srinivas, who was a great devotee and was often seen reading the *Bhāgavatam*, a book about Sri Krishna. Gadai [Ramakrishna's name as a child] and Srinivas were great friends, despite the difference in their ages. Often they had hot arguments about religious matters. When Gadai found he was about to lose, he would climb on his opponent's shoulders. Srinivas would then start weeping. Invariably the argument would end with Srinivas feeding Gadai with sweets.

One day Srinivas took Gadai to a solitary corner in the village forest. He first worshipped Gadai with flowers and sweets. Then, with folded hands and tears rolling down his cheeks, he said to him:

> Lord, I know who you are. You are an Avatar. You have come to save humanity. The time will come when the whole world will worship you. But

I won't live to see that. Lord, remember, I am one of the first to recognize you as an Incarnation of God.[44]

You incarnated yourself...because your heart was moved and you were unable to bear the sufferings of men and women. Ramakrishna's whole life was dedicated to taking people to God. Even when he contracted throat cancer, his compassionate nature would not allow him to stop helping people and teaching them. His doctor asked him to stop talking, yet 'the doctor's advice was almost impossible for Ramakrishna to follow. There was hardly a time when he was alone. His room was always full of people. And when word of his illness spread, the number of visitors increased. They came to hear him talk about God, so how could he possibly disappoint them?'[45]

But Ramakrishna's love and concern for devotees did not stop with his passing away.

A young Ramait monk [a worshipper of Ramachandra] in Ayodhya had a vision that God had again incarnated on earth, somewhere in the east. In order to see him, the monk started on foot eastward from Ayodhya. When he reached Bengal he heard that there was a great saint named Sri Ramakrishna near Calcutta. He finally found Dakshineswar after a long search and asked someone, 'Where is Ramakrishna Paramahamsa?' The people of the Kali temple told him that the Master had just passed away a few days before. Hearing this heart-breaking news, the monk exclaimed: 'What! He passed away? I have come from Ayodhya on foot [nearly a thousand miles] just to see him. I went through so much hardship to get here and he has left the body!' The young monk began to sob.

The manager of the Kali temple offered him some food from the temple store but he refused it. He went to the Panchavati and stayed there for two or three days without eating. One night Sri Ramakrishna appeared before him and said: 'You have not eaten anything for several days. I have brought this pudding for you. Please eat it.' He fed the monk and disappeared.[46]

Ecstasy was natural to you. Once Swami Prabhavananda said:

It [Ramakrishna's *bhāvamukha*] was a condition between *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa*, you can say. He was the observer of both these kinds of *samādhi*. Put another way, He *was* God [Personal] and he *was* Brahman — so the both

of these together is just what he was; naturally his mind could alternate between them. He had *savikalpa* on his left hand and *nirvikalpa* in his right, so to speak, whereas others, jīvas, come from *samādhi* down to 'normal consciousness', he came to this *bhāvamukha* instead, being both Īśvara and Brahman.[47]

We worship that pure Supreme Self, Ramakrishna. That very Ramakrishna whom we adore as seated in our hearts is the blissful Lord dwelling in all things and beings. Him, whose very nature is love, we worship now with love.

Who Worships Whom?

In ritualistic worship one must first arouse the consciousness of the divine within oneself by various *nyāsas* and meditations, and then only can one worship the symbol or image of God without. As Swami Ashokananda once said: 'Now to worship, you must have a body; so you get a new body made of the name of Ramakrishna. This is *nyāsa*.'[48] But it is not just one's body that is transformed. Gradually one's whole being is transformed. For this reason it is often said: *Devo bhutvā devam yajet*, 'one worships the divine by becoming the divine.'

Nammalvar used to feel that it was God who was writing his own poems to himself through Nammalvar.

> What indeed can I say?
> With my soul he has become one —
> My words, spoken by me
> are these my poems?
> His words they are —
> he, in his own praise, does speak.
> Of him I spoke before
> the Lord who is
> all three in one.[49]

Similarly, a sincere worshipper — no matter whether he worships in a shrine room, in a hospital, in a school, or anywhere else — will feel that it is really that blissful Lord who is worshipping himself through the worshipper. This is true worship in the Ramakrishna tradition.

References

1 Swami Virajananda, *Towards the Goal Supreme, Paramartha Prasanga* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995], 177.

2 When the Maharaja expressed his disapproval of image worship, Swamiji asked someone to bring a portrait of the Maharaja down from the wall and spit on it. No one would do it, of course. Swamiji then explained to the Maharaja that, though the picture was not the Maharaja, still it represented him. Similarly, the image represented God to the devotee. See, *The Life of Swamiji Vivekananda by His Eastern & Western Disciples* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981], 1:268-70. Hereafter *Life of Swami Vivekananda*.

3 Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Shankaracharya* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994], 129. *Hereafter* Pande.

4 *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya of Sri Shankaracharya*, trans. by Swami Gambhirananda [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993], 116.

5 See, Pande, 122-29.

6 For example, when Śaunaka asked Sūta why Śuka Deva, who was a knower of Brahman and who was completely detached from this world, had recited the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Sūta replied: 'Such are the blessed qualities of the Supreme Lord that even those sages whose sole delight is in the Self, and whose bonds of ignorance have been severed, offer spontaneous worship to Lord Hari' (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, I.7.9-10).

7 Satish Chandra Chatterjee, *Classical Indian Philosophies: Their Synthesis in the Philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna* [Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1985], 110. Hereafter Chatterjee.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 111.

10 Ibid., 116-17.

11 *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1986], 436. Hearafter *Gospel*.

12 Chatterjee, 150-51.

13 Chatterjee calls it *Samanvayī Vedanta*, or Synthetic Vedanta, in one place (p. 105). It is synthetic 'in the sense of being a synthesis of all schools of the Vedanta.' Later he calls it 'Neo-Advaita' (p. 149).

14 'A man kept a solution of dye in a tub. Many people came to him to have their clothes dyed. He would ask a customer, "What colour would you like to have your cloth dyed?" If the customer wanted red, then the man would dip the cloth in the tub and say, "Here

is your cloth dyed red." If another customer wanted his cloth dyed yellow, the man would dip his cloth in the same tub and say, "Here is your cloth dyed yellow." If a customer wanted his cloth dyed blue, the man would dip it in the same tub and say, "Here is your cloth dyed blue." Thus he would dye the clothes of his customers different colours, dipping them all in the same solution. One of the customers watched all this with amazement. The man asked him, "Well, what colour do you want for your cloth?" The customer said, "Brother, dye my cloth the colour of the dye in your tub."' (*Gospel*, 858-59)

[15] *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, II:572.

[16] Swami Kamaleswarananda, *Sri Ramakrishna Parikar Prasanga* [1st edition, 1384], 28.

[17] The afflicted, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the man of Knowledge — *Bhagavad Gita*, 7.16.

[18] *Bhagavad Gita, with the Commentary of Shankaracarya*, trans. by Swami Gambhirananda [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991], 328.

[19] Vidya Dehejia, *Slaves of the Lord, The Path of the Tamil Saints* [New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988], 66-67. Hereafter *Slaves*.

[20] *Gospel*, 183.

[21] See Alkondavilli Govindacharya, *The Holy Lives of the Azhvars or the Dravida Saints* [Bombay: Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 1982], 106-10.

[22] It is thought to be the Kailasanatha Temple in Kanchipuram.

[23] See *Slaves*, 85-86.

[24] *Gospel*, 810.

[25] *Gospel*, 797-98.

[26] Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* [Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1994], 154-55.

[27] Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, Trans. by Swami Jagadananda [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1991], II:596. Hereafter *Great Master*.

[28] Ibid.

[29] *Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal Through the Ages*, ed. by Swami Kirtidananda [Kankhal: Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, (n.d.)], 20-21.

[30] Ibid., 45-46.

[31] Ibid., annexure A, ii.

[32] Swami Satprakashananda, *Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to the Present Age* [St. Louis: Vedanta Society, 1978], 186-87.

[33] *For Seekers of God*, trans. by Swami Vividishananda and Swami Gambhirananda

[Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993], 293.

[34] Ibid., 283.

[35] Poem by Akshay Kumar Sen, trans. by Swami Lokeswarananda.

[36] *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati Memorial ed., 1989], VI:478. Hereafter *CW*.

[37] Story often told by Swami Satprakashananda in St. Louis. The brother disciple was Ramachandra Datta.

[38] Swami Yogeshananda, *Six Lighted Windows* [(n.p.), 1995], 26. Hereafter *Windows*.

[39] Hymn by Swami Abhedananda, trans. by Swami Lokeswarananda.

[40] *Windows*, 5.

[41] Ibid.

[42] *Great Master*, II:802.

[43] Swami Prabhavananda, in *Windows*, 113.

[44] Swami Lokeswarananda, *Ramakrishna Paramahansa* [(n.p.): Sahitya Akademi, 1996], 9.

[45] Ibid., 47.

[46] *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him*, ed. by Swami Chetanananda [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992], 56-57.

[47] *Windows*, 57.

[48] Ibid., 390.

[49] *Slaves*, 111.

The Four Yogas and their Synthesis

NIROD BARAN CHAKRABORTY

I

YOGA MEANS UNION of the finite self with the Self Infinite and also the path leading to that union. Thus yoga is used in two different senses: (1) as the goal of spiritual life, which is union of the finite with the Infinite, or liberation from the sufferings of the mundane existence, and (2) as the path leading to the goal.

In this paper we shall discuss yoga in the second sense, i.e. as the pathway to liberation or freedom from all sufferings of human life. Normally four yogas are accepted, and these are of knowledge (*jñāna*), devotion (*bhakti*), action (*karma*), and deep meditation (*rāja*). All these are equally efficacious. Swami Vivekananda observes:

> You must remember that freedom of the soul is the goal of all yogas, and each one equally leads to the same result. By work alone men may get to where Buddha got largely by meditation or Christ by prayer. Buddha was a working *jñāni*, Christ was a *bhakta*, but the same goal was reached by both of them.[1]

Sometimes he used to say:

> Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy — by one, or more, or all of these — and be free.[2]

The first quotation speaks of the yogas as alternative ways to freedom, but the second one appears to advocate a combination of some or all the yogas. Before we enter into the implications of these quotations, we shall discuss the nature of the yogas.

By Knowledge, Self-Knowledge is meant, and mind purification is its presupposition, for unless the mind is purified Self-Knowledge is impossible. Shankara prescribes certain ethico-metaphysical disciplines for purification. These are: (1) discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal, (2) indifference to the fruits of one's action either in this world or in another world, (3) control of the senses and possession of certain virtues, and lastly (4) intense yearning for Liberation. Unless a man has discrimination (*viveka*) between the eternal and the non-eternal and indifference (*vairāgya*) to the fruits of his actions, he is not fit for *jñāna-yoga*. Positive attainment of Self-Knowledge implies the rejection or negation of what is other than the Self. Thus the path of knowledge proceeds through negations. The knowledge aimed at is not attained through argumentation or ratiocination, but through immediate apprehension or intuitive grasp.

Nothing new is attained; only ignorance is removed. The finite self is really the Infinite Self. Through the limitation of ignorance, it appears finite. Knowledge removes ignorance and the Self is manifest in its pristine purity. Persons with a thinking bent of mind, bold enough to go against usual behaviour and aptitude, alone can take up *jñāna-yoga*. This *jñāna* or Knowledge is not intellectual or rational. It is supra-rational and not anti-rational. This is knowledge by identification and not by differentiation. This is not an invention, but a discovery that each soul is essentially divine. Ignorance obscures the essential nature of a man which knowledge reveals or discovers. This cannot be a path for all. To *jñāna-yogins* like Shankara, the Ultimate Reality is Indeterminate Brahman or the Inmost Self. The fourth chapter of the *Gita* discusses this yoga.

Jñāna as a means of liberation has different steps, viz. (1) *Śravaṇa*, or listening to the teachings of the preceptor, (2) *Manana*, or the removal of doubts and ascertainment of the truth, and (3) *Nididhyāsana*, or constant meditation which culminates in the realization of the essential nature of the individual self, which is non-different from the Universal Self. Patanjali's yoga is included in *jñāna-yoga* in the form of *nididhyāsana*. To many (such as

Sri Harsha), the grace of God (*īśvarānugraha*) is necessary for attaining knowledge. Even in the *Gita* the Lord says that *buddhi-yoga* (which is really *jñāna-yoga*) is a gift of the Lord to those who are devoted to Him.[3] Shankara, however, will admit the importance of karma or bhakti only for the weak, or *nimnādhikāri*. These are unnecessary, according to him, for the strong and highly competent.

Bhakti is emotional attachment distinct from knowledge or action.[4] The *upāsanā* theory of the Upaniṣads and the devotional way of the *Bhāgavata* are combined in *bhakti-yoga*. Devotion to the Supreme is possible only with a personal God — Saguṇa Brahman or Īśvara. Sri Krishna declares: 'This is my word of promise that he who loveth Me shall not perish.'[5] The nature of love for God, or *bhakti*, is said to be indescribable, 'as is the sense of taste for a dumb person'.[6] The devotee 'looks only on the object of his devotion, talks only about Him and thinks only of Him'.[7] God says in the *Gita*: 'Fix thy mind in Me, into Me let thy understanding enter; thou shall surely live with Me alone hereafter.'[8] The forms which *bhakti* takes are: contemplation of God's power, wisdom and goodness, constant remembrance of Him with a devout heart, conversing about His qualities with other persons, singing his praises with fellow-men, and doing all acts as His service.[9] A devotee escapes from the loneliness and the insignificance of the world. True devotion issues in unselfish conduct. When devotion is perfected, then the individual and his God become merged in one spiritual ecstasy.

Bhakti-yoga, according to Swami Vivekananda, 'is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing, and ending in love. One single moment of the madness of extreme love to God brings us eternal freedom.'[10] *Bhakti*, says Nārada, 'is intense love for God'. When a man gets it, he loves all, hates none; he becomes satisfied for ever. This love cannot be reduced to any earthly benefit, because so long as worldly desires last, this kind of love does not come. '*Bhakti* is greater than *karma*, greater than *yoga*, because these are intended for an object in view, while *bhakti* is its own fruition, its own means and its own end.'[11]

Self-surrender and love of God taken together constitute *bhakti* in the complete meaning of the term. The description of *bhakti* as self-surrender may suggest that it is to be attained simply through such passive virtues as meekness and humility, but it is not so. It also demands of man that he should faithfully

discharge his duties — secular as well as religious. Only, if they are to serve as a means of *bhakti*, he should give up all thought of reaping any personal advantage through them. Hence, the path of devotion has the same ethical implication of self-conquest as the path of knowledge. Knowledge without devotion is as futile as devotion without knowledge. Unless a man has some knowledge of God, however imperfect it may be, he cannot be devoted to Him.

We should remember in this context that the word *bhakti* comes from a Sanskrit root meaning 'to serve' or 'to resort to', and signifies 'service' or 'resorting to another for assistance'. This shows that *bhakti* is related to service, which means a form of action. Since devotion is not possible without knowledge, it is not unrelated to action.

Bhakti occurs in the *Kauṣītakī* (3.1) and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads* (6.23), in the *Gita*, specially in its fourth chapter, and it is emphasized by the *Bhāgavata* and the various schools of theistic Vedanta. Bhaktivādins do not accept essential non-difference between an individual and God. They are for a bit of difference between the two. Even Ramanuja, a bhakti-vādi-vedāntin, accepts similarity and not identity between the *jīva* (an individual) and Brahman (the Ultimate).

The *Bhāgavata*,[12] *Nārada*,[13] and *Śāṇḍilya*[14] throw open the path of devotion to all. The *Bhāgavata* says: 'Even a person of low birth is liberated from bondage if he utters the name of God only once.' Nārada says: 'Among the devotees of God, there is no distinction of birth, learning, appearance, family, wealth, religious observances, and the like, since they all belong to Him.' *Śāṇḍilya* observes: 'All persons, even down to the lowest born, have equal right to follow the path of devotion, it has been taught by generations of authorities.' Sri Krishna says:

> Even if a person of the vilest conduct worships me with undivided devotion, he should be regarded as a saint, for he has made the choice that is as irrevocable as it is righteous. He quickly becomes a virtuous soul and attains lasting peace. O Arjuna, this is my word of promise that he who loves me with all his heart never perishes.[15]

Jñāna-yoga is said to be a very difficult path as it proceeds through negations, including the negation of the world. Ordinary people cannot accept the world as false. Moreover, they, with their imperfections, are interested in

God's grace, as it can work miracles in their life. *Jñāna-yoga* gives God a subordinate place and all importance to Indeterminate Brahman which is beyond ordinary apprehension. *Jñāna-yoga* advocates *sāyujya mukti*, implying non-difference between the individual and the Ultimate, whereas bhaktivādins speak of *sālokya*, *sāmīpya*, *sārūpya* or *sārṣṭi mukti* according to the mood and temperament of the devotees. *Sālokya* implies going to the same abode, like Goloka, where God resides. *Sāmīpya* means to be very close to God. *Sārūpya* aims at similarity with God, and *sārṣṭi*, acquisition of His excellencies.The *jñāna-yogi's* ideal of losing his identity and merging in Brahman does not attract the majority of the people. They prefer the enjoyment of the relationship of love with the Divine.

Sri Ramakrishna observes: 'Indeterminate Brahman may be realized. But this realization is very difficult to attain. This is impossible if even a slight trace of yearning for worldly objects is left.'[16] He adds that *bhakti-yoga* is for the Kaliyuga. Singing the name of God, prasing Him and praying to Him constitute this *yoga*. *Bhakti-yoga* is the religion of this age.

Just like *jñāna* and *bhakti*, *karma* also is a *yoga*. Lord Krishna has discussed this *yoga* in the third chapter of the *Gita*. In the *Īśā Upaniṣad* we can trace the presence of this *yoga* where involvement in *karma* is encouraged without any consideration for its consequences, i.e., interest in *karma* and disinterest in *karma-phala* (the result of one's action) should go together. *Karma-yoga* is the secret of work (*karmasu kauśalam*) and it implies (1) action with the renunciation of its fruits, or disinterested action, (2) the sacrifice of egoism or the pride of being a doer, and (3) dedication of the fruits of one's actions to God with the belief that all actions are God's actions.

In the *Pūrva Mīmāmsā*, *karma* means the sacrifice that is prescribed in the Vedas. The principal implication of *karma* here is *yajña*. The word *karma* is used in the *Gita* in this sense also.[17] But this is not the usual sense there. The specific duties prescribed for the four *varṇas* — *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and *śūdra* — are mainly referred to in the *Gita*.[18] These are known as *svadharma*, one's own duty. Failing in *svadharma* is better than *paradharma*,[19] doing another's duty. This is what the *Gita* preaches. But in some *ślokas* of the *Gita* the word *karma* is used to mean any work.[20]

Attainment of Self-knowledge through the purification of the mind may be the means of liberation.[21] God can also be attained by dedicating all fruits

of action to Him.[22] One who dedicates all actions to God is his devotee. Thus knowledge, action, and devotion, though different, may well be in conformity with one another.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'It is difficult to do disinterested action. I may think that I am doing disinterested action, but unknowingly interest creeps in.'[23] Swami Vivekananda observes:

> The word *karma* is derived from the Sanskrit *kri*, to do; all action is *karma*. Technically, this word also means the effects of actions. In connection with metaphysics, it sometimes means the effects, of which our past actions were the causes. But in *Karma-yoga* we have simply to do with the word *karma* as meaning work....[24] The ideal man is he who, in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude, finds the intensest activity, and in the midst of the intensest activity finds the silence and solitude of the desert. He has learnt the secret of restraint, he has controlled himself.... That is the ideal of *Karma-yoga*, and if you have attained to that, you have really learnt the secret of work.[25]

Four important points in this context are emphasized by Swamiji:

> First we have to bear in mind that we are all debtors to the world and the world does not owe us anything.... In helping the world we really help ourselves. The second point is that there is a God in this universe.... He is working incessantly; all the changes and manifestations of the world are His. Thirdly, we ought not to hate anyone. This world will always continue to be a mixture of good and evil. Our duty is to sympathise with the weak and to love even the wrongdoer.... Fourthly, we ought not to be fanatics of any kind, because fanaticism is opposed to love.[26]

Karma performed as a sacrifice to God and in a spirit of disinterestedness is quite as efficacious as any other method, and there is no need to subordinate it to the method of wisdom or that of devotion. Men are of different temperaments, and they will have to act according to the law of their own being. People of a thinking bent of mind will follow *jñāna-yoga*, emotional persons are fit for *bhakti*, and active beings should take up action to reach the goal. Sri Ramakrishna observes: 'Look here, limitless paths lead to the Ocean of nectar. Somehow or other you will have to fall into it. If you can taste the nectar, you will be immortal.'[27]

The *yoga* propagated by Patanjali is also an independent path for self-realization. Restraint from some actions such as killing animals, telling lies, stealing, indulging in sense-pleasures, accepting a gift from anybody, constitute *yama*, the first step to *yoga*. The second step is *niyama* or the cultivation of certain virtues such as purity, contentment, reading of scriptures, and surrender to God. The third step is the practice of certain postures (*āsanas*) for concentration of mind. The fourth step is *prāṇāyāma* or breath control. The fifth one is *pratyāhāra* or the withdrawal of the senses from their respective objects. The sixth step is *dhāraṇā* or fixed attention for a long time. The seventh one is meditation, or *dhyāna*, and the eighth and the last one is *samādhi*, absorption or identification. Even Shankara in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* (2. 1. 3) has recognized the importance of *yoga-sādhanā* as necessary for self-realization. Ordinarily persons of meditative temperament can take up *rāja-yoga* for the attainment of the *summum bonum* of human life. Cessation of all mental modifications is *Pātanjala-yoga*, and this is very difficult to attain.

When a man proceeds in *rāja-yoga sādhāna*, he attains some supernatural powers, which are known as *siddhis*. If an aspirant confines himself to these powers and is satisfied with them, he will never attain the desired goal. This is why both Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna were against them.

In a sense, *rāja-yoga* as concentration and renunciation is necessary for all yogas. *Jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma* without concentration and renunciation are not possible at all. *Jñāna* requires *manana* or meditation on the Self and renunciation of the world. *Bhakti* implies complete surrender to God and this is not possible without the sacrifice of egoism. *Karma* requires concentration of mind in the work to be done and renunciation of the fruits of one's action and of the egoism of the doer.

Here one will be reminded of Swami Vivekananda's saying: 'Three things are necessary for a bird to fly — the two wings and the tail as the rudder for steering. *Jñāna* (knowledge) is the one wing, *bhakti* (love) is the other, and *yoga* is the tail that keeps up the balance.'[28]

II

The word *synthesis* in the context of yogas may be used in different senses. Consequently, the synthesis of the four yogas will be understood in

different ways. Synthesis may mean: (1) harmony in the sense of the absence of contradiction and antagonism, (2) combination, and (3) alternatives that are equally efficacious. When we discussed the nature of the four yogas, we saw that every yoga involves other yogas, and these are not incompatible or antagonistic. *Jñāna* may require *karma* or disinterested action for the purification of the mind, *bhakti* or God's grace for the knowledge of Advaita, and *rāja-yoga* as *manana* (deep concentration for deliberation) and *nididhyāsana* (meditation). *Bhakti* presupposes knowledge of God. Unless a man has some awareness of God he cannot be devoted to Him. Devotion again is related to certain actions like service to God, chanting His name, and praying to Him. In the same way, *karma* is related to knowledge in the sense that all actions are really God's actions, and that disinterested action cannot bind just as a dried up seed cannot germinate. Thus we can well speak of the synthesis of yogas in the first sense.

Buddhism, Jainism, *Pūrva Mīmāmsā*, Ramanuja, and many other bhakti-vādi-vedāntins understand the synthesis of yogas in the second sense, as the combination of the yogas. Swami Vivekananda understands it that way also when he asks us to manifest our potential divinity by more than one yoga or by all the yogas, and so does Sri Aurobindo.

Lord Buddha speaks of the eight-fold noble path, which implies a combination of *prajñā* (wisdom), *śīla* (good action), and *samādhi* or meditation on the four noble truths for the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, the *summum bonum* of human life. Here *jñāna*, *karma*, and *rāja-yoga* are combined. Of course, in this context, yoga as a goal will not mean any union between an individual and the supreme, as no permanent self is admitted by Lord Buddha. Here yoga is to be taken as a pathway to *nirvāṇa*. In Jainism *samyak darśan* (right faith in or respect for the teachings of the Tīrthaṇkaras, path finders), *samyak jñāna* (right knowledge) of the teachings, and *samyak caritra* (doing good, and avoiding bad actions) are considered as the *triratna* for the attainment of liberation. Respect (*bhakti*), *jñāna* and action are combined in this context.

Pūrva Mīmāmsakas advocate *jñāna-karma-samuccaya vāda* (a combination of knowledge and action). Action here, of course, is understood in a technical sense, meaning Vedic sacrifice (*vaidic yajña*). Shankara, in his *Gita-bhāṣya*, and also in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, has refuted this *samuccaya vāda* or combination theory.[29] He is of the opinion that *karma* aims at the attainment

of heaven, and knowledge aims at the attainment of *mokṣa* or liberation. So their aims are different. Moreover, action depends on human volition, but knowledge depends on objective truth which is independent of any personal endeavour. Action again is based on the difference between the doer and the deed, while difference is false and non-difference is the truth. In the second chapter of the *Gita*, *jñāna-karma-samuccaya vāda* has been rejected.

Bhakti-vādi-vedāntins like Ramanuja will advocate a form of combination theory where by *jñāna* they mean *upāsanātmaka jñāna* or knowledge based on prayer and devotion. Their emphasis, of course, is on devotion.

Swami Vivekananda, as we have pointed out before, sometimes speaks of the combination of the yogas. He advocates a form of synthesis of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *rāja-yoga*.[30] He also prescribes a combination of work, worship, psychic control, and philosophy.[31]

Here it may be specially mentioned that Swamiji gives Advaita a unique form in 'service of man as service to God', and he established the Ramakrishna Mission with this end in view. He got this idea from his great guru, Sri Ramakrishna. This 'service to man as service to God' is not ordinary *karma-yoga*, which purifies one's heart and makes one fit for ultimate realization. This is really a new *sādhanā* for realizing God, being a synthesis of the familiar *jñāna*, *bhakti*, *karma*, and *rāja-yogas*. This is more efficacious than any one of them. Here a man is to be known as God through *jñāna-yoga*. He is to be meditated on as the Self of all human beings with the help of *rāja-yoga*. Through *bhakti-yoga* one is to have all love for him, and through selfless service or *karma-yoga*, he is to be served. In this service there is no dualism between the server and the served. They are really spiritually identified, and Ultimate Oneness or Advaita shines.

Sri Aurobindo understands the synthesis of yogas in the sense of their combination. He says:

> A combination of all these three approaches, the approach of the mind, the approach of the will, the approach of the heart, creates a spiritual or psychic condition of the surface being and nature in which there is a larger and more complex opening to the psychic light within us and to the spiritual self or the Īśvara, to the reality now felt above and enveloping and penetrating us.[32]

Sri Ramakrishna appears to be an advocate of the synthesis of yogas in the third sense as alternative pathways to liberation or God-realization. Swamiji follows him when he asks us to manifest our potential divinity either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy. He observes: '*Bhakti-yoga*, *jñāna-yoga*, and the like are all paths. You will get Him whatever path you follow.'[33] Different people are of different temperaments, tastes, and capacities. Consequently, different paths suit different people. He remarks: 'A mother prepares different dishes to feed her different children. For some she prepares rice with fish (polao). But everybody's stomach cannot stand it, so she cooks soup. She cares for different capacities of digestion. Some prefer fish-fry, some a sour preparation, according to their tastes.'[34] But Sri Ramakrishna prefers *bhakti-yoga* for the people of the Kali-yuga, as it is easier than other paths. Of course sincerity and earnestness are absolutely necessary for success.

III

One problem here we may discuss. Are the three senses of the word *synthesis* really three and different or are all these essentially one formulated in different ways? If 'synthesis' means 'absence of contradiction and antagonism' (first sense), it follows that their combination is possible (second sense), as contradictory paths cannot normally be combined. But does not this combination imply the importance of one and the absence of equal importance to all? Can a man be equally intellectual, emotional, volitional, and meditative? This is not ordinarily possible. Even in the case of Vivekananda, he is said to be essentially a *bhakta* though outwardly a *jñānī*, and his great guru Sri Ramakrishna is taken as an apparent *bhakta* and essentially a *jñānī*. Really, in the second sense of synthesis, which follows from the first, the importance of one is to be emphasized. Thus *jñāna* is the most important to some, *bhakti* to some, *karma* to some others, and meditation or *rāja-yoga* to still others. Consequently, 'synthesis' implies that the four yogas are really alternatives. This is the third sense of the term *synthesis* and Sri Ramakrishna appears to admit this. Of course Sri Ramakrishna followed different paths at different times and came to realize their ultimate Oneness. He used to say: 'Pure knowledge (*śuddha jñāna*) and pure devotion (*śuddha bhakti*) are one.'[35]

Sri Ramakrishna was of the opinion that Religion is one, but it may have different manifestations. In the same way, we may say that yoga is ultimately one but it may have different formulations. Renunciation is the ultimate path for spiritual realization. Without it no spiritual *sādhanā* is possible. In *jñāna-yoga* renunciation appears in the form of negations (*neti, neti*). In *bhakti-yoga* complete surrender to the will of God is the form of renunciation. In *karma-yoga* renunciation is operative in the forms of disinterestedness in the results of actions and forgetfulness of doership. In *rāja-yoga, pratyāhāra* or withdrawal of the senses from their objects is renunciation, which is the key to *antaraṇga yoga — dhāraṇā, dhyāna* and *samādhi*. Shall we be wrong if we say that harmony or the synthesis of the yogas may be understood as the ultimate oneness of different yogas in the form of renunciation, which, according to the Holy Mother, is the fundamental idea (*mūla bhāva*) of the message of Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet of harmony? The *Bhagavad Gita* is taken to preach the synthesis of yogas.[36]

We have discussed this point earlier. But we should not forget that Sri Ramakrishna used to say that we get the main teaching of the *Gita* if we change the order of the letters and say *tāgi*, which means a man of renunciation. To ordinary people the paths of yoga are different, but to many men of realization these are one at the bottom, and their differences are only in manifestations and formulations.

References

1 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama], I:55. Hereafter *CW*.

2 Ibid., 124.

3 *Bhagavad Gita*, 10.10. Hereafter *Gita*.

4 *Śāṇḍilya Sūtras*, 1, 4-5, 7.

5 *Gita*, 9.31.

6 *Nāradīya Sūtras*, 51-52.

7 Ibid., 55.

8 *Gita*, 8.8.

9 *Nāradīya Sūtras*, 16-18.

10 *CW*, III: 31.

[11] Ibid., 31-32.

[12] *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, XI.14.21; III.33.7; V.1.35. Hereafter *Bhāgavata*.

[13] *Nāradīya Sūtras*, 72, 73.

[14] *Śāndilya Sūtras*, 78.

[15] *Gita*, 9.30-32.

[16] *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita*, 3.9.4 (trans. by the author). Hereafter *Kathāmrita*.

[17] *Gita*, 3.14-15; 18.3.

[18] Ibid., 18.42-44.

[19] Ibid., 18.47.

[20] Ibid., 3.5; 5.8.9.

[21] Ibid., 5.11.

[22] Ibid., 3.30; 9.27.

[23] *Kathāmrita*, 1st Part (1883), 133.

[24] *CW*, 1.27.

[25] Ibid., 34.

[26] Ibid., 80.

[27] *Kathāmrita*, 1.11.4.

[28] *CW*, III:33.

[29] Shankara's *bhāṣya* on *Brahma Sūtras*, 1.1.1; and *upodghāta* of the *Gita bhāṣya*.

[30] *CW*, III:33.

[31] Ibid., 1:124.

[32] Aurobindo (Sri), *The Future Evolution of Man*, 85.

[33] *Kathāmrita*, 3.9.4 (trans. by the author).

[34] Ibid., 2.2.3.

[35] Ibid., 1.7.5.

[36] *Ye yathā mām prapadyante tāmstathaiva bhajāmyaham; mama vartmānuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ* — *Gita*, 4.11 (I bless everyone in whatever way he adores me. O Pārtha, all men are following my path by all means).

Seeing God in a World of Many Religions

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA'S TEACHINGS ON THE CHOSEN DEITY

FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, S.J.

Introduction

THERE HAVE ALWAYS been many religions, but in recent years we have had to reflect and pray a great deal about what this plurality means and how it affects our understanding of ourselves and God. Even in America and Europe, people of different religious traditions are meeting each other with increasing regularity. We live as neighbours and meet in many different contexts, not only formal but also in the ordinary course of school and work and recreation. Even when we pray, we tend to be much more conscious than before of how others pray and have found God — or whatever they would name the ultimate religious reality to be. Most of us recognize that we need to be willing to learn religiously from one another in a healthy, positive fashion that respects our similarities and differences. Yet even if we are well disposed to religious diversity, many of us are also uncomfortable with the lazy tolerance that can creep up on us: 'Live and let live; I will respect what you say if you respect what I say, no matter what it is; deep down we all mean the same thing anyway.' Such an attitude closes the door on true learning. It is a sure way to miss religious opportunities.

So it has been a pleasure for me to return to some of the basic writings of the Ramakrishna tradition, ranging from *The Great Master* and *The Gospel* to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and the influential swamis from the early

years of the Mission, and contribute to this volume a small piece of writing. Their wise reflections on religion and its meaning in the context of pluralism continue to help us towards a balanced and disciplined spiritual attitude regarding religious diversity. This essay is devoted to just one example of this wisdom: the teachings by Swami Brahmananda, the illustrious first President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, on the concept of the *Iṣṭa*, the 'chosen', i.e. the 'Chosen Deity' or the 'Chosen Ideal'.[1]

Recently I have been reading his *A Guide to Spiritual Life*.[2] This small but wise book, appealingly translated by Swami Chetanananda (to whom those of us who do not know Bengali must be very grateful!), offers us a glimpse of Brahmananda's practical guidance to seekers after spiritual growth. In it he repeatedly returns to the notion of 'Chosen Deity', indicating how different people will have their own preferred representations of the Divine, on which they meditate with singular devotion, while yet recognizing that others may worship God with different names and forms. In the glossary at the end of *The Eternal Companion*, Shiva and Vishnu are given as examples of possible Chosen Deities:

> When worshipped as the Chosen Deity, Shiva is the total Godhead, the supreme Reality.... As the Chosen Ideal of the Vaishnavas, Vishnu represents not only the preserver aspect of the Personal God but the Personal God himself.[3]

For a long time I have been aware of the roots of the teachings on 'Chosen Deity' even in texts as ancient as the classical yoga system of Patanjali, where focusing on a deity is recognized as an useful instrument in disciplined meditation. Swami Brahmananda's teachings have helped me to trace the development of the idea, and to see its specific relevance in the modern world, how it is very fruitful for us to realize that people think about, visualize, and relate to God in different ways which are really different meditation practices. If we see the connection between representations of God and disciplined spiritual practice, it becomes possible to esteem the subjective element in religious experience without reducing our ideas and images of God to a series of merely subjective presentations. In the following pages, I will simply recount what I have been learning from Brahmananda's teaching itself, and from its likely contexts. Since I am only a friendly 'visitor' to the Ramakrishna tradition, it

may be that some of the points that interest me will seem familiar or even obvious to those learned in the tradition, and some of my conclusions may seem to be even odd or unexpected, but I trust that learned readers will bear with me patiently.

Brahmananda's Teaching on the Chosen Deity

In *A Guide to Spiritual Life* he refers frequently to the ideal of the 'Chosen Deity' as many as twenty times. There is even a whole chapter on the topic. The chapters record teachings from 1913 to 1922, and Brahmananda's message seems consistent throughout. In this section I will describe what I understand to be the main points in his teaching.

First, Brahmananda insists that meditating on one's Chosen Deity will be of great value for those learning how to meditate, particularly as they wrestle with distractions:

> Try diligently to check this mad outward rush of your mind. You can do this successfully if you do not try to meditate as soon as you sit down. First draw the mind back from its external pursuits by means of discrimination and lock it up inside, at the sacred feet of your Chosen Deity.[4]

This is a difficult but necessary process. Before this, in answering a question about how to control the mind which wanders during meditation, he says in *A Guide to spiritual Life*:

> You must bring the mind under control again and again and engage it in meditation on the Chosen Deity…you must engage the mind forcibly in contemplation of the Chosen Deity. It is like swallowing a bitter medicine to get rid of fever. Slowly spiritual joy will flow within you.[5]

But later in the book, in advising young monks, he also suggests that the beginning of focused meditation can be made gentle and joyful by focusing on the benign face of the Deity:

> When you practice meditation, first think of the blissful form of your Chosen Deity. That will soothe your nerves. Think that he is looking at you with a smiling face and with joy.[6]

The process, once begun, expands fruitfully:

> One should begin practice according to one's own mode of *sādhanā* [spiritual practice]. After becoming established in that, one can take up other paths and experience the same bliss of God. Don't be emotional. Control your feelings. Japam [repeated recitation of one's mantra] becomes tasteless if it is not connected with the thought of the Chosen Deity.[7]

Even this meditation can be undertaken gradually, as best one can:

> If you cannot visualize the full form during meditation, start with only one part. First concentrate on the lotus feet of the Deity.[8]

Second, as is already clear, Brahmananda's teaching on the Chosen Deity is specific and practical. In chapter 27, which is devoted primarily to the Chosen Deity ideal, he recommends the following steps:

- Hold the mind firmly to the feet of your Chosen Deity. Visualize it gradually, moving from there up.
- Visualize your Chosen Deity as facing you in the heart, and visualize the Deity as you see him/her in a picture, but while thinking of him/her as 'living, luminous, and blissful'.
- Next, concentrate on your Chosen Deity in the heart, i.e. in the *anāhata cakra*.
- Recite your mantra while meditating on your Chosen Deity.
- Contemplate your mantra and your Chosen Deity together, word and form, the name and the one named.

While what is personally appropriate figures significantly in this meditation — this works for me, this gives me joy. Contemplating the Chosen Deity is nevertheless a quite specific and structured way of meditating.

Third, I wish to highlight one detail from the previous paragraph, by noting Brahmananda's insistence that the visualization of your Chosen Deity is always connected with the recitation of one's mantra:

> [Indeed] there is no difference in meaning between the mantram and the Chosen Ideal. They mean the same thing. He is your all in all.[9]

According to the glossary in *The Eternal Companion*, the mantra is 'the particular name of God corresponding to the Chosen Deity of the disciple...the mantram, regarded as one with God, represents the essence of the guru's instruction to his disciple.'[10] The mantra is a guide for correct meditation:

> You must not let the Chosen Ideal leave your mind — meditation and mantram must go together. However, your experience of the mantram shows that you are proceeding along the right path.[11]

To link the act of meditation with a mantra is, of course, an ancient tradition. Ritual actions have always been accompanied by words. In explaining the Vedic rituals, for instance, the Mīmāmsā theorists insisted on the harmony of ritual action with ritual words, the mantra. Even today temple worship includes both reverent acts before images and words to be recited. But the emphasis on mantra seems also to have a broader theological significance which is of particular importance today: the balancing of visualization and the spoken word may be taken as signifying a balance of heart and head. What one does religiously, however devotionally intense, must also be intelligible, appropriate to mind as well as heart. Most of our religious experiences, most of the time, should be able to be articulated in words. They should be present to the mind and, insofar as possible, intelligible to it.

Fourth, although this meditation is instructive and helpful for the beginners, it is not just for them. Committing oneself to meditation on the Chosen Deity charts a path for spiritual advancement, even to what Brahmananda sees as the highest forms of self-realization:

> In meditation you should think of the form of the Chosen Deity as effulgent. Imagine that everything is shining through his lustre. Think of him as a conscious Being. This kind of meditation gradually turns into meditation on the formless aspect of God. Your awareness will be filled with God-consciousness. Then, when the knowledge-eye opens, you will see God face to face.[12]

Brahmananda explains this as progress from meditation which is helped by forms and qualities (*saguṇa*) to meditation without any such helps (*nirguṇa*). One begins with a clear and specific image of one's Deity, and thereby begins

a journey towards a transcendental state where self and world are shown to be one, although in the end it is God that one sees 'face to face'.[13] In *The Eternal Companion*, Swami Prabhavananda cites interestingly similar words about the progress of meditation, stressing even more vividly the process of interior puja:

> First worship the Chosen Ideal mentally with flowers, incense, etc. and then practice meditation and mental japam.... As you meditate on your Chosen Deity, think of him as bright and effulgent, and that everything shines because of his light. Think of him as living and conscious. As you continue thus, the form of your Chosen Deity will gradually melt into the formless, into the Infinite. Then will follow a vivid sense of the Living Presence, until, finally, the eye of wisdom will open and the Infinite will be directly perceived.[14]

Another passage describes the beginning and end of the process very clearly, identifying the highest state and then three stages leading up to it:

> The highest *sādhanā* [spiritual practice] is to experience the Atman [Self] all the time. The stage prior to this is meditation. At that time the aspirant feels that only God and he exist. In deep meditation he sees the form of his Chosen Deity and cannot continue his japam. In the stage prior to meditation, the aspirant glorifies God, chants his name, and at the same time thinks of his form. [Finally,] the last method is the ritualistic worship of God embodied in an image or symbol. These are all different stages of evolution of the mind. [But] each person begins his spiritual journey from where he is.[15]

Or, to trace the chronological progress: first, external ritual worship, perhaps before the image of one's Chosen Deity; second, recitation, prayer, glorification of God who is represented by this image; third, interior meditation on God as this Chosen Deity, within one's heart; and fourth, the realization of the unity of one's own Self and this Deity. In another place, Brahmananda puts it this way:

> The aspirant must begin his spiritual practice by offering mental worship to his Chosen Ideal — God with form. Then he must meditate on his shining

> form and gradually let this form melt into the Formless. God is with form, he is without form, and he is beyond both.[16]

Fifth, and finally, I wish to note a point that is so central for Brahmananda and his tradition that it might just as well have been listed first: his emphasis on the role of the guru. Although meditation on the Chosen Deity is a personal matter appropriate to each person individually, identifying the Chosen Deity and the corresponding mantra is not a private choice. Brahmananda emphasizes, rather, that the role of the guru is indispensable, and that it is the guru who 'selects' the Deity for the disciple. To get beyond a restless shifting from deity to deity and to find the appropriate Chosen Deity, the seeker must rely on a teacher:

> The guru selects the mantra and the Chosen Deity according to the nature of the disciple.[17] A real guru is one who, through meditation, can see the Chosen Deity of a disciple, and instruct him or her accordingly.[18]

For the guru to be able to identify the Chosen Deity for the disciple, a serious preparatory process must be gone through:

> Before initiation the guru and the disciple should test each other for a long time.[19]

For the guru, it is a spiritual achievement to discern the disciple's Chosen Deity, as Brahmananda explains regarding his own experience:

> There is much work involved in initiating a disciple. I have to meditate long hours to select the Chosen Deity of each disciple. One day a man came to me for initiation. I thought that if I could know his Chosen Deity in meditation, I would initiate him, otherwise not. After one hour's meditation, I saw the form of a Deity and later came to know from him that that was his favourite Deity.[20]

Notice that while a person's 'favourite Deity' may coincide with his or her 'Chosen Deity', this is not to be taken for granted. Likewise, as I have already mentioned, the process of meditating on the Chosen Deity, once identified, is also quite specific and not left entirely to the devotee's preferences. The teacher is of great importance in learning to approach the Deity.

Brahmananda also notes that one of the culminating achievements in meditation is to realize the actual identity of the guru and the Chosen Deity. Once again echoing the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Brahmananda indicates that the guru too must be interiorized by the seeker, who must eventually come to identify the guru with the Chosen Deity — not just in theory, but in actual meditation.

> The guru should not be looked upon as an ordinary human being. His physical body is the temple in which the Lord resides. If the guru is served with this attitude, one attains love and devotion for him, which can then be directed towards the Lord. One should meditate on the guru in the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain [in the *sahasrāra cakra*] and then merge the guru into the Chosen Deity.[21]

He continues with a reference which alludes to the corpse-ritual (*śava-sādhanā*):

> Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'The guru appears before the disciple in a vision and points ahead, saying, "Look, there is your Chosen Deity." After this the guru himself merges into the Chosen Deity.' Really, the guru is not different from the Chosen Deity.[22]

Even in the earlier stages of meditation, one can aim towards this realization of the unity of guru, Deity, and self:

> As you meditate on your Chosen Deity in the heart, similarly, before you begin your spiritual practices, meditate on your guru in the heart. Think that the guru and the Chosen Deity are one. Then merge the form of the guru into the form of the Chosen Deity. After that repeat your mantram and meditate on the Chosen Deity.[23]

Adapting the Ideal of the Chosen Deity in the Modern World

In this section I wish simply to observe the accommodation of the Chosen Deity ideal in the modern world. We have seen that the Chosen Deity ideal is rooted in very specific practices and personal experiences, and that it is presented as a disciplined, precise practice by Brahmananda. There is a passage in the

glossary to *The Eternal Companion* which reminds us of the traditional boundaries of the ideal. On the one hand, 'The latent divinity which is within each human soul becomes awakened by repetition of the mantram and meditation on the aspect of Godhead which it represents. The aspect of Godhead which is worshipped by an aspirant is called his Chosen Ideal.' On the other hand, 'This does not mean, however, that an aspirant can worship God in one aspect today and another aspect tomorrow. It is imperative that he should hold to his Chosen Deity.... Devotion to one Ideal is absolutely necessary for the beginner in his practice of religious discipline.'[24]

Yet it is a flexible ideal, one that has a future and can be adapted. In one passage, Brahmananda himself invites his listeners to make their own choice:

> *Choose the aspect of God which most appeals to you*, and when you feel a growing devotion toward that one aspect, when you feel a steadfast love toward your Chosen Deity, you will love God in all his aspects.[25]

To supplement this passage, I wish to offer just one more example of how the teaching on the Chosen Deity was extended over time. In *Seeing God Everywhere*, Swami Shraddhananda, who lived and taught for many years in California, USA, offered a fresh presentation of the ideal of the Chosen Deity, an explanation which seems to give the seeker much more initiative and responsibility:

> When we are interested in seeking God, *we should first settle upon which God we are seeking*, because different pictures of God are given in different religions, and even in the same religion different concepts of God are found. Further, the emotional and intellectual constitution of each mind is different; it is only natural that different people will approach God in different ways. *If the seeker cannot decide which particular idea of God to meditate on* among the innumerable concepts of the Divine, he or she should seek the guidance of a competent spiritual teacher. If this question is not settled, one's spiritual life is bound to be confused.[26]

This admission of personal preference places the ideal in the context of people making personal choices about how to worship in a situation of wider religious pluralism; if one cannot decide on a Chosen Deity by oneself, then one should consider consulting a teacher.

The Chosen Deity ideal offers rich insight into the traditions which have made the Ramakrishna Order a living and vital spiritual community over the past century. I find it very interesting and edifying to see how the ideal of the Chosen Deity, rooted in old ritual practices which may seem quite puzzling to people today, was adapted first by Sri Ramakrishna and then by his disciples to fit changing circumstances. Used by teachers blessed with spiritual wisdom and prudence, the Chosen Deity ideal has functioned as a help to beginners in meditation and a strong link between gurus and disciples. It offers a way of making the religious tradition flexible enough to be suited to the needs of individual devotees, while yet also serving as a way to draw individuals into a deeper and richer spirituality which goes beyond their initial concepts and tastes.

A Concluding Christian Reflection

In the preceding section I have tried to stay as close as possible to the teachings of Brahmananda, and to learn from him about the Chosen Deity ideal. Let me extend my comments briefly by saying what the Chosen Deity ideal suggests to me as a Christian.

Clearly, the concept itself can be of great help to the Christian, simply as a guide to spiritual growth and meditation. As we Christians hear about how Brahmananda guided his disciples in meditation and showed them how to begin to see God and then see more and more deeply, we are encouraged to review the practices of meditation in our own tradition: how do we Christians lead people from what is comforting and familiar in their religious experience to encounters in which God may graciously choose to face them directly? Certainly, those of us who are asked to guide people in prayer and meditation can learn much from the Chosen Deity ideal about how to balance fidelity to tradition with responsiveness to the needs and tastes of an individual. So too, the close connection between the guru and the Chosen Deity is of interest to the Christian, for in our tradition Jesus is the great teacher. In India, I have met Christians who testify to the role of Jesus as their God and as their Guru in the spiritual journey towards God. Some would say that for the Christian, Jesus is the only Guru, God and Teacher perfectly united.

We Christians should also be prompted to think about how we pray. Of course, it is at the core of Christian faith to focus on Jesus, and it is a revered

tradition for us to pray before a crucifix or other image of Jesus. Just as the tradition of the Chosen Deity is rooted in specific ritual practices, Christian devotion to Jesus has for many centuries had deep roots in contemplating the crucified and suffering Jesus. Some Christian traditions of spirituality, both East and West, teach methods of visualization which seem very akin to learning to see the Chosen Deity. I think, for instance, of the Orthodox devotion to icons, and my own Jesuit tradition of contemplating Jesus in various scenes of his life. Neither practice is quite the same as the spirituality of the Chosen Deity, but the similarities are rich enough to merit our attention. Even today, we are often encouraged to hold an image of Jesus in our minds and hearts when we pray, and to place ourselves in his presence, for a face to face encounter: what has the crucified one done for us, and how shall we respond to him?

As long as we keep the whole teaching on the Chosen Deity before us, and thereby resist making it merely a matter of choosing a deity, it is even helpful for Christians to think of Jesus as our Chosen Deity — and, by extension, to think of ourselves as 'a people chosen to meet God as this God.' This is so particularly in the situation of religious pluralism where we find ourselves. While we Christians do not want to think of Jesus as merely 'our choice' for a God, we must admit that we choose, and keep choosing, to see God in and through this Jesus who seems so very familiar to us. Just as a swami in the Ramakrishna Mission might give to various disciples various possible presentations of God as their Chosen Deities, we Christians certainly believe that we have been given Jesus as the visible form of God in our midst, and we keep this tradition alive in our teaching and worship.

While we might also believe that Jesus can become the Chosen Deity for all people, most of us today are also aware that this 'preference', however deeply it might be felt, cannot be imposed on people without respect for how they have found and seen God already. Indeed, a very good way for us to make our God known to all may be simply to show that we have personally found peace and joy through envisioning the face of Jesus as the face of God. Perhaps we will be able to hear anew the words our Teacher spoke about his disciples and his Father:

> Father, the Glory that You have given me I have given to them, so that they may be one, as You and I are one. I in them, and You in me, that they

may become completely one, so that the world may know that You have sent me and have loved them even as You have loved me.[27]

I close with one more reference to Brahmananda's teaching in *A Guide to Spiritual Life*, a bit of wisdom that should help us all as we deepen our personal commitments in a world of so many religious possibilities. In one passage he mentions that during meditation people may find other deities impinging upon their vision of their own Chosen Deity. He says that they should not exclude these other images harshly, because they are not obstacles to spiritual advancement.

> Question: What shall I do if while meditating on my Chosen Deity other forms of gods and goddesses appear before me?
>
> Brahmananda: Know it to be a very auspicious sign. At that time think that your Chosen Deity is appearing through those forms. He is one and again he is many. Visualize your Chosen Deity, but if he appears before you in another form, enjoy that divine vision. After some days you will see that those forms will merge into your Chosen Deity.[28]

This advice casts out fear. As a Christian, I will be concerned to keep pure and simple my commitment to Jesus Christ, but I need not protect this fidelity through defensiveness or fear or a sharp dismissal of other traditions' spiritual riches. Swami's words encourage us to keep looking ahead, and into our hearts, trusting that God's familiar face will not be lost to us as we meet God more deeply, today.

References

1 For the sake of consistency, in my citations from *The Eternal Companion*, I substitute 'Chosen Deity' for 'Chosen Ideal'. Both terms translate *iṣṭa* (*deva*).

2 *A Guide to Spiritual Life: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*, trans. by Swami Chetanananda [St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1988]. Hereafter *Guide*. I will also have occasion to refer to its companion volume: Swami Prabhavananda's *The Eternal Companion — Brahmananda: His Life and Teachings* [Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1970]. Hereafter *Eternal Companion*.

3 *Eternal Companion*, p. 300.

[4] *Eternal Companion*, p.234.

[5] *Guide*, p.46.

[6] Ibid., p. 115.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] *Eternal Companion*, p. 144.

[10] Ibid., p. 296.

[11] Ibid., p. 264.

[12] *Guide*, p. 119.

[13] Ibid., p. 120.

[14] *Eternal Companion*, p. 202.

[15] *Guide*, p. 140.

[16] *Eternal Companion*, p. 261.

[17] *Guide*, p. 48.

[18] Ibid., p. 64.

[19] Ibid., p. 50.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., p. 120.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., p. 101-02.

[24] *Eternal Companion*, pp. 293-94.

[25] Ibid., p. 208. Emphasis is mine.

[26] Swami Shraddhananda, *Seeing God Everywhere*, ed. by Pravrajika Vrajaprana [Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1996], 1-2. My emphasis.

[27] *The Gospel according to John*, 17.22-23.

[28] *Guide*, p. 101.

The Place of Scripture in the Ramakrishna Movement

SWAMI HARSHANANDA

THE GREATEST GOOD for the greatest number of people in any society is achieved only when a very large section of that society accepts *satya* (truthfulness) and *dharma* (righteousness) as practical ideals of life. For centuries the sages of India have succeeded in instilling these values in the minds of people. Many foreign travellers, from the 4th century BC to the 19th century AD, have vouched for the basic honesty and truthfulness of the common people of India.

However, conviction about these values and their practice in life, to be vigorously sustained, often needs to be buttressed by a strong and self-sustaining movement governed by persons of sterling character. Ramakrishna, the modern Incarnation, and Vivekananda, his chief apostle, have provided exactly that. They have given us a solid religio-cultural movement which is slowly but surely gaining ground, bringing within its compass more and more people of all countries, races, and cultures.

This movement, though rooted firmly in the ancient Hindu monastic ideals of chastity and renunciation of possessions, has certain unique features that make it different from the traditional Hindu monasticism. It embraces the whole gamut of the religio-spiritual development of the entire Hindu race over the last five millennia or more. Not only that, it has provided a place in itself for the people of other religions and cultures too. Consequently sectarianism and bigotry are unknown to it. While no less stress is laid on austerity and learning, it has added the new concept of work as selfless service to those in need, ultimately

elevating selfless work to the level of worship of God, thereby contributing to the spiritual uplift of all concerned. It has completely eschewed any association with politics. But, by quietly working for character-building through the inculcation of right values in the minds of human beings, it has been helping society to carry out 'root and branch reform' as Vivekananda put it.

A movement such as this, for which the spread of right values in society is of paramount importance, cannot but pay the greatest attention to the study of the scriptures and the dissemination of their essential teachings. That is why Vivekananda has ordained learning and preaching as cardinal to this monastic organization.

The teachings of Ramakrishna and the teachings of Vivekananda in regard to the acquisition of intellectual learning and the dissemination of knowledge may appear to be diametrically opposed and hence perplexing to us. To Ramakrishna, realization and revelation are more important than reasoning and punditry. He would rather have you eat the mangoes (by first cultivating the friendship with the owner of the mango garden) than count the leaves on the trees. He would not relish your teaching and preaching to the world unless you have secured the 'licence', i.e. unless you have secured the authority of God-realization.

On the other hand, Vivekananda does not want you to believe a Buddha or a Shankara, or even himself, unless they have convinced you. He lays great emphasis on learning Sanskrit and studying our scriptures in the original. He wants his disciples to try to discover the true import of the Vedic mantras, make original interpretations, and even write their own commentaries on the Shāstras!

How to reconcile these two diametrically opposite views is a task worth undertaking. Ramakrishna's exhortations were for the average spiritual aspirant. Vivekananda's directions were mainly for the monastic disciples. Since they had dedicated their lives to *ātma-mokṣa* or Self-realization, they were bound to strive their utmost for that experience. However, as monks and spiritual leaders, they could not abdicate their responsibility of educating their flock. As Ramakrishna declares, a pin may be enough to kill oneself, but to fight with others one needs a sword and a shield. In exactly the same way, those who have to teach the world should equip themselves thoroughly before venturing upon teaching and preaching work.

Not that Ramakrishna never advocated the study of the scriptures. He only pointed out its limitations. He gave an example to illustrate this idea. Once a man from a village, living in Calcutta, received a letter from his relatives of the village. He carelessly misplaced it. Then, after a hectic search, he found it, read it, threw it away, and then went to the market to purchase the things asked for in the letter. He needed the letter only as long as he did not know what it contained. Once that was known, there was no more need to read it, but only to do what it asked him to. Similarly, study of the scriptures is necessary only to know the modes and methods of spiritual disciplines that will lead to God-realization.

However, it is not without significance that Ramakrishna made Narendra (Vivekananda) study such scriptural texts as the *Aṣṭāvakra Samhitā*. Ramakrishna knew that Narendra would become, in course of time, a monk and a world teacher. It was therefore necessary to train him for that role. Persuading him to study that difficult text was a part — though symbolic — of that training.

Vivekananda advocated the study of the Sanskrit language. He himself had mastered the *sūtras* of Pānini and its *bhāṣya* by Patanjali. He could speak fluently in that language and even composed wonderful hymns characterized by devotional fervour and philosophical acumen. Being an Advaitin, he was naturally an admirer of Shankaracarya.

Even then, he boldly differed from him and the other Ācāryas in the manner of interpreting the scriptural texts. He felt that the Ācāryas had not done full justice to the Vedas and the Vedanta since they had treated them as favouring only one system of thought. It was his conviction that these scriptures contained teachings suited to different aspirants at different stages of evolution. Hence he felt it would be far better to interpret them in the light of Ramakrishna's life and teachings, which alone could give the correct picture. This would gradually lead to the sinking of differences among the various sections of people and establish greater unity and harmony among them.

Great spiritual truths contained in the scriptures had for ages unfortunately become confined to certain classes of people. Vivekananda therefore strongly felt — and rightly so — that they had to be resurrected and brought out of the hermitages, forests, and caves, and broadcast all over the world. True to this conviction, he himself did the pioneering work through his now famous

discourses, conversations, class talks, and epistles. These are cast in a simple and direct language which is at the same time scintillating and inspiring. His talks on the various aspects of Vedanta — now compiled into one book, *Jñāna-Yoga* — throw a new light on many abstruse points. He has simplified the concept of maya by describing it as a statement of fact, something which is experienced, but cannot be easily expressed. His *Karma-Yoga*, composed in a mellifluous style and containing fascinating stories, is a treat to read. There he has boldly advocated the theory that karma-yoga can also directly lead to realization and liberation. In his *Raja-Yoga*, he has explained its recondite concepts in a simple and intelligible language. In fact, it is a pioneering work. In his *Bhakti-Yoga*, he has clearly distinguished between true devotion and mere emotionalism and has vigorously defended the love of the Gopis for Krishna.

The high tradition he established in the field of scholarly study of the scriptures and the dissemination of their ideals among people in a way they can understand and appreciate, has been vigorously kept up by his colleagues and by his successors in the Ramakrishna Movement. Swamis Abhedananda, Ramakrishnananda, Saradananda, Turiyananda and Vijnanananda were scholars of immense learning and great repute. The Sanskrit hymns composed by Swami Abhedananda and his voluminous commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Yogasūtras* of Patanjali have enhanced the prestige of the Ramakrishna Movement, carving a place for it in the world of scholarship. Saradananda's exposition of the Tantras, Turiyananda's exposition of Vedanta through his conversations and letters, Ramakrishnananda's works containing general essays on religion and philosophy, Vijnanananda's specialization in the fields of the Purāṇas and Hindu Astronomy-Astrology have added much to the stature of the Ramakrishna Order.

Spreading the knowledge of the scriptures among the people — especially those with only an average education — is a continuing process. Apart from holding regular scripture classes, discourses on religio-philosophical themes, seminars, and retreats, the various centres of the Ramakrishna Order are doing commendable work by publishing books and journals not only in English but also in the vernaculars. The amount of literature brought out so far is, by any standard, impressive. It includes the *Bhagavad Gita*, all the important Upaniṣads, the *Brahma Sūtras*, several Vedantic treatises such as the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*

and *Ātmabodha*, hymnal literature including the famous *Caṇḍī* and *Lalitāsahasranāma*, texts of selected portions of the Vedas with intonation marks to facilitate their chanting, and technical works in the fields of meditation and mysticism like the *Yogasūtras* of Patanjali. Another admirable feature of some of these works is the attempts made to correlate the ideas in these scriptures with modern science, including psychology.

The great attention paid to the accuracy and quality of these works and also their attractive appearance and reasonable prices have made these books popular. Not only that, they have also gained recognition and acceptance in the world of academicians and scholars.

Standing firmly on the foundation of the highest spiritual experiences, Ramakrishna experimented with religions other than Hinduism. He found that they also led to the same experience of beatitude. Hence his respect for other religions was a natural corollary of this experience. His disciples and their disciples have kept up the same tradition — viewing the scriptures of other religions with respect. Vivekananda himself had made a deep study of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, as had Abhedananda and Ramakrishnananda. Some of the books published by the Ramakrishna Order breathe this spirit of universal acceptance.

To sum up, the Ramakrishna Movement has duly recognized the eminent place that the Hindu scriptures occupy in Hinduism. While recognizing the relative roles of reason and revelation, it has noted the inherent limitations of reason and hence has leaned towards direct realization, true to the Ramakrishna tradition. It has rendered yeomen service in the field of spreading the basic ideas of the scriptures through its various publications, journals, and preaching programmes. It has kept up a respectful attitude towards the scriptures of other religions and has avoided controversies based on dogmatism or a fanatical approach to religion.

One can only pray, at this juncture, when the Ramakrishna Mission, an important limb of the Ramakrishna Movement, has completed its 100 years of useful existence, that it will become an even more worthy instrument to carry out Sri Ramakrishna's mission.

Vedanta and Science

SWAMI JITATMANANDA

THE VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY in all its dimensions derives from the *Brahma Sūtras* of Vyāsa, the Upaniṣads, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. The word 'Vedanta' etymologically means the concluding portion (*anta*) of the Vedas, and it refers to the Upaniṣads. Over the centuries the Vedanta philosophy has become divided into twelve major schools, of which three, viz. the Advaita (monistic) Vedanta of Shankara, the Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified monism) of Ramanujacarya, and the Dvaita (dualism) of Madhva, are more well known. Bādarāyana (Vyāsa) wrote the *Brahma Sūtras* in order to expound the Vedanta philosophy and to systematize the teachings of the Upaniṣads on the fundamental truths of life, existence, and the universe.

The ultimate Reality in the Vedanta philosophy is called Brahman, which is Existence (*Sat*), Knowledge (*Cit*), Bliss (*Ānanda*) Absolute. In the *Brahma Sūtras* (1. 1. 2: *Janmādyasya yatah*), Brahman is defined as the self-willed cause of the evolution, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe. Gaudapāda's *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, Vedanta in its most abstract form, holds that the immanent springs from the transcendent *turīya*, that our consciousness creates the external world, and that Advaita (non-duality) is the highest reality (verses 1.10; 2.16; 3.18).

According to Shankaracarya, the great exponent of Advaita or monistic Vedanta, 'Brahman alone is real, the world of many is not real, and the individual soul is one with the supreme Self, or Brahman' (*Brahma satyam jagat mithyā, jīva brahma eva na aparah*). The action of creation in space-time is only apparent (*vivarta*). He calls it *adhyāsa* or *adhyāropa* (superimposition) by the

veiling power of *avidyā* (nescience) or maya. 'It was Shankara who first found out the identity of time, space, and causation with Maya',[1] says Vivekananda. Brahman being in space-time appears as many realities in this space-time world due to maya. But maya cannot be said to be either existent or non-existent (*tattvānyatvābhyām anirvacanīya*). Maya is also regarded in later Vedanta as the energy (Shakti) of Brahman known as *ādiśakti* or the primordial energy. Sri Ramakrishna's constant refrain was 'Brahman and Shakti are one', i.e. infinite Consciousness and infinite Energy are one. Shankara says that through *vidyā*, i.e. by bringing true discriminative knowledge of Reality in the individual consciousness, *apavāda* or de-superimposition takes place.

Brahman (also called Īshvara by Ramanuja) is immanent in this universe of diverse objects, both sentient (*cit*) and insentient (*acit*), and yet It transcends them. Ramanuja's system is called Viśiṣṭādvaita, where the absolute is qualified (*viśiṣṭa*) by *cit* and *acit*. For Madhva, the champion of dualistic Vedanta, God is eternally separate from this space-time-causation world, which is controlled by Him. While Shankara tried to interpret the Vedanta philosophy as monism, Ramanuja as qualified monism, and Madhva as pure dualism, Sri Ramakrishna accepted all the three schools as gradual stages of a man's understanding of the Ultimate, which culminates in monism. 'He who gets the whole must have the parts too. Dualism is included in Advaitism (monism)',[2] said Swami Vivekananda, following in the footsteps of his Master. In Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta, the world is not unreal. It is real with *God in everything*. Some of the fundamental concepts of Vedanta are as follows:

- The finite has the infinite as its background. The individual soul (atman) is therefore identified with the universal Soul (Brahman). *Aham brahmāsmi* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1. 4. 10).
- The universe is holistic, where everything is fundamentally interconnected by a common background — Brahman. *Mayi sarvamidam protam sūtre maṇigaṇā iva* (*Bhagavad Gita*, 7. 7).
- In this world of maya, i.e. space-time-causation, things can happen without any apparent or local cause.
- The external world, which is transitory and therefore unreal, is created by our consciousness. *Dṛśyāh dhīvṛttayah* (*Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka*).
- Everything living and non-living is interpenetrated by Brahman, the all-

pervading consciousness. *Sarvam khalu idam brahma* (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 3. 14. 1).

- All energy or force in the universe is derived from one cosmic energy or *prāṇa*.

Modern science is slowly approaching these ancient truths of Vedanta, and Vivekananda, the greatest exponent of Vedanta in the language of modern science, interpreted Vedanta to bring about this meeting.

For Vivekananda, Vedanta was synonymous with the Upaniṣads. He called Newton and Galileo 'prophets of the physical science', and the Upaniṣadic seers 'prophets of spirituality'. Vivekananda declared that in the ultimate analysis 'the whole universe, mental and material, will be fused into one.'[3] Any branch of knowledge in the physical world, even physics, will ultimately lead to the same end as the pursuit of truth in the spiritual world.[4] He also said that the only philosophy to satisfy the rationalist is Advaita or monistic Vedanta,[5] which is based on the fundamental unity of all existence.

Today, after a hundred years, historians of science admit the importance of Vivekananda's contribution in making a bridge between science and Vedanta. 'From its modern awakening with Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, eastern mysticism has begun to adapt its revelations to the entirely different cultural framework provided by science and technology, without in any way sacrificing what is valid in the traditional understanding of the phenomenon itself', writes A. D. Reincourt in his well-known book *The Eye of Shiva*.[6]

The Quantum World: Matter Dematerialized (*Jagat Mithyā* — Matter is Unreal)

Votaries of 'scientific materialism' declared scientists to be the 'new bishops' of 'church scientific',[7] because matter was considered the ultimate truth. Democritus thought the atom, or atamos, was the building block of matter. Finally, atoms were broken, and inside them, according to Niels Bohr, electrons (discovered by J. J. Thomson in 1897) were thought to be rotating around a nucleus made of protons (discovered by Rutherford in 1911) and neutrons (discovered by James Chadwick in 1935). Protons, so long considered stable, are today found decaying. Their half-life is 10^{32} years.

In 1914, Einstein, through his discovery of the photo-electric effect, proved that light waves behave also as particles. Then in 1924 Louis de Broglie showed through his electron diffraction experiment that not only photons, but all particles like electrons behave as waves.

Erwin Schrödinger, around 1925, proved that electrons are 'standing waves' — waves which can also be quantized (Schrödinger's wave-equation). Wave-particle duality baffled scientists, and Einstein admitted that no one knows the true nature of 'light quanta'.[8] Max Born completed the baffling scene by showing that electrons are not even real waves. They are 'Probability waves', which is 'a purely abstract...mathematical concept...in which we cannot enter.'[9]

Finally, the nucleus was broken, giving birth to a host of sub-nuclear particles. Every sub-atomic interaction consists of the annihilation of the original particles and the creation of new sub-atomic particles, as shown clearly in Feynman's diagram. After nuclear fission, high-energy particle physics has met with more than 250 particles, some of which live only a few particle seconds (a particle second is 10^{-23} second). The shortest-lived particle created is known as Renosance. 'A Renosance is a particle, but not an object. It is better described as an event, an occurrence, or a happening', says Prof. Capra.[10] Sub-nuclear particles are, obviously, on the increase, in what is known as 'particle-zoo'.

Matter, in the ultimate analysis, has stood dematerialized. Bertrand Russell summed up the dematerialization of this material universe, saying:

> I experienced the delight of believing that the sensible world is real. Bit by bit, chiefly under the influence of physics, this delight has faded.... I find myself in the vast mist of solitude both emotional and metaphysical from which I can find no issue.[11]

At the 1973 World Congress of Scientists in Washington, Heisenberg declared:

> What is needed is a change in fundamental concepts. We are probably forced in our concepts to abandon the atomic materialism of Democritus.[12]

Continuous Energy Dance in the Universe (*Prāṇa vai brahma*: Cosmic Energy is the Ultimate Reality)

Paul Dirac, in a new line of thinking, formulated the field concept of the electron. Every sub-atomic particle is, in a sense, a field of force, and the force of the field increases as the electron speeds on. An electron increases from 100 times to 11,800 times its rest-mass, as happens in accelerators. The Uncertainty Principle showed that the so-called empty space teems with particles and anti-particles, whose constant clash adds up to an infinite amount of energy.[13]

In the new 'quantum relativistic' model of sub-atomic physics, which is still the most successful, the primary concept is of a 'quantum field', i.e. of a field of energy which can take the form of quanta, or particles. 'There is no place in this new kind of physics both for field and matter, for the field is the only reality', said Einstein.[14] Particles are mere temporary condensations of the energy field.

All Energy is Derived from Consciousness

According to Vedanta, space is Brahman (*kham brahma*, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 4. 10. 4). Space is verily a play of cosmic energy (*prāṇa vai satyam*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2. 3. 6). It is the continuous dance of creation and destruction of Nataraja Shiva, as Fritjof Capra has shown in his book *The Tao of Physics*.[15] Vedanta says all the energies in the universe are manifestations of one cosmic energy or *prāṇa*. The Nobel prize winning discovery of electro-nuclear force by Abdus Salam, Sheldon Glashaw, and Steven Weinberg has already condensed the five forces — electricity, magnetism, weak–interaction, strong-interaction, and gravity — into three forces. Scientists are dreaming of a total unification of all forces through the Grand Unified Theory (G.U.T.). And this cosmic energy is activated, according to Vedanta, by infinite consciousness, which the Upaniṣads describe as 'the Truth of truths' (*satyasya satyam*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 2. 3. 6).

Today physicists have begun to accept consciousness as an indispensable factor in physics. The first acceptance came in 1931 from Max Planck: 'Consciousness I regard as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness.'[16] Again, the Nobel physicist Eugene Wigner wrote in the 1960s:

'The principal argument against materialism is that thought process and consciousness are primary concepts.'[17] Niels Bohr too realized that in quantum physics 'consciousness applied to ourselves as well as to others is indispensable.'[18] In 1970 Fritjof Capra wrote on the bootstrap theory proposed by Geoffrey Chew: 'Increased use of the bootstrap approach opens the unprecedented possibility of being forced to include the study of human consciousness explicitly in the future theories of matter.'[19]

Consciousness is not in the Brain: It is All-pervading

The British neurologist John Eccles, who won the Nobel prize in 1963 for his pioneering research on the synapse in the brain, came to the conclusion that consciousness is 'extra-cerebral'. He announced that the interactions between the extra-cerebral consciousness and brain matter take place in the supplementary motor area, or SMA, located at the top of the brain and first discovered by Wilder Penfield in the 1920s. Eccles believes that it is by a 'complex code' that the 'non-physical mind' entered our physical brain during embryological development, and thus, according to Eccles, 'It is conceivable that such a non-physical self might also survive the death of our physical body and brain.'[20]

After twenty years of research, Wilder Penfield, the greatest neurosurgeon of this century, finally came to the conclusion that mind or consciousness is not in the 'cerebral cortex'. To suppose that consciousness of the mind has location is a failure to understand neurophysiology.'[21] Nobel scientist George Wald echoed Penfield: 'Consciousness itself lies outside the parameters of space and time that would make it accessible to science...consciousness cannot be located. But more, it has no location.'[22] Brahman the Absolute Consciousness is all-pervading and eternal — *nitya sarvagata*, says the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*.

The Uncertainty Principle (the Fundamental Uncertainty of the External World) — the Omnijective Reality

The Uncertainty Principle of Werner Heisenberg, with its famous equation $.q \times .p > h$, conclusively proved that there must always be an element of 'uncertainty' or indeterminancy in our knowledge of sub-atomic

particles. Both position (p) and velocity (q) must be known in order to describe sub-atomic particles, which move at incredibly high speeds. The Uncertainty Principle proved that both these factors of any particle can never be fully known. (i) All sub-atomic particles therefore remain unknown and unknowable.

Two more conclusions of the Uncertainty Principle demolished the old pillars of classical physics: (ii) Strict causality is impossible in the sub-atomic world; and (iii) A purely objective description of reality is not possible. We cannot observe anything in the sub-atomic world without changing it.

Einstein, as a believer in Spinoza's God of harmony, stood against the second conclusion, the law of non-causality brought by the Uncertainty Principle, and insisted that 'God does not play dice'. Niels Bohr finally gave him the famous reply: 'Nor is it our business to prescribe to God how to run the world.' Yet Einstein persisted, saying that there must be a 'hidden variable' responsible for this uncertainty. However, as yet no hidden variable has been found. Nobel physicist Eugene Wigner proposed that it is the consciousness of the scientist which is the 'hidden variable'.[23]

The third conclusion says that in the quantum world the act of observation by the scientist alters the final outcome of the experiment. The sub-atomic reality is no longer 'objective' but inextricably connected with the 'subjective' element of the physicist.[24] It is 'omnijective', as Michael Talbot likes to describe it. In our daily life, however, according to Geoffrey Chew, a mechanism called de-coherence causes certain probabilities to be overwhelming and failure of causality becomes miniscule, where uncertainty is minimum (around $1/10^{60}$)[25]. The Uncertainty Principle thus established two basic principles of the Vedanta philosophy:

- The world of external reality is based on maya, or uncertainty, where strict causality can never operate.
- It is consciousness which decides the nature of the external world.

Consciousness Creates the External Reality

Erwin Schrödinger's wave equation gave a stronger validity to the third conclusion of the Uncertainty Principle. Michael Talbot writes:

> In certain circumstances Schrödinger's wave function predicted the behaviour of a given particle up to a point and then described equally probable outcomes of the same particle.

The two outcomes then branch into possibilities of four, eight, sixteen, and so on *ad infinitum.*[26]

In fact, the wave equation suggests an endlessly proliferating number of possibilities for the observed system (external reality) whether it is observed or not. Schrödinger tried to explain this strange phenomenon through his thought-experiment known as Schrödinger's Cat. M. Talbot wrote: 'If Schrödinger's equation does represent reality, perhaps consciousness itself is the hidden variable' — the variable that decides how the outcome of an event actually occurs. Wigner asserted that it is impossible to give a description of quantum mechanical processes 'without explicit reference to consciousness.'[27]

Graham, Hugh Everett, and John Wheeler concluded that in Schrödinger's wave equation, the wave function is the real thing. All the possibilities that it represents are real and they all happen. This is known as 'the many world interpretation of quantum physics.'

According to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, Schrödinger's wave equation generates an endlessly proliferating number of possibilities. 'According to the Everett-Wheeler-Graham theory, the same development generates an endlessly proliferating different branches of reality', writes Gary Zukov.[28]

The wave equation, according to many physicists today, represents a world of 'multi-dimensional-reality', and leads to the conclusion that the external world is created by our mind. In fact, the wave equation 'denies the existence of a physical reality', writes Talbot.[29]

This is one of the conclusions of Vedanta, known as *dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda.* The *Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka* says: *Dṛśyāh dhī vrittayah, sākṣi dṛk eva na tu dṛśyate*, 'The external scenes are creations of our mind. The Self is the witness, whom none can see.' Swami Vivekananda also said: 'Matter is only externalized thought. That which we have inside, we see outside. The boy has no thief inside, and sees no thief outside. So with all knowledge.'

A world without 'objectivity and locality' is a subjective world. A quantum scientist is, therefore, a 'solipsist', says Fred Alan Wolf. 'The quantum solipsist

is a powerful individual, for after all he or she is the whole universe. He uses his power in magical, beneficial ways. He uses his mind. Perhaps the hidden variable is the mind?' writes F. A. Wolf.[30] Again he says, 'If quantum physics continues to give a correct picture of reality, then perhaps little is impossible.'[31] As Vivekananda said, 'Man is the maker of his own destiny.'

Is Matter Conscious?

In 1901, through a series of 321 open experiments, Sir J. C. Bose proved in London that the same life and consciousness pulsate in all living things — in plants, and even in metals! The science journal *Nature* said that this outcome proceeded 'so smoothly and logically', although it is outside 'the existing corpus of knowledge'. The *Times* of London commented that the 'subtle easterner' brought science out of 'rude empiricism of barbaric life', and 'had swept the world into a synthesis'. The British scientist Sir Robert Austen praised Bose and felt happy that metals have life.[32] Decades later Schrödinger asserted that 'consciousness is never experienced in the plural, only in the singular'.

In 1957, the Nobel physicist Richard Feynman, in a series of BBC lectures, interpreted the Probability-Wave theory of Max Born and showed that probability waves are waves which somehow possess the organic capacity to decide their own course of action. Feynman demonstrated through the double-slit experiment that[33] electrons or photons, while moving like waves, betray a strange element of intelligence and choice. 'How does the particle [electron] find the right path?' asks Feynman. 'All your instincts on cause and effect go haywire when you say that the particle decides to take the path that is going to give the minimum action.'[34] 'Physicists found themselves dealing with energy', writes Gary Zukov, 'that somehow possessed information.'[35]

Physicist Jack Sarfatti writes: 'I suspect that the general relativity and quantum theory are simply two complementary aspects of a deeper theory that will involve a type of cosmic consciousness as the key concept.'[36] Vedanta asserts that Brahman, the one all-pervading consciousness, has interpenetrated this entire universe — *sarvam khalu idam brahma* (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 3. 14. 1).

Spirit: The Fifth Dimension of Matter

In the 1970s Rupert Sheldrake, a Cambridge plant physiologist, presented, on the basis of experiments, the concept of a morphic field of all living bodies. This morphic field is the field of the activities of the life force inside a human body or any living organism. But it is a field that has a capacity to regenerate into a whole. In the human body, when part of the liver is removed, the liver tissues develop and grow into a complete liver. Branches of trees give birth to complete trees. This 'wholeness', according to Sheldrake, 'could be as a reflection of a transcendent unity on which they depended and from which they were ultimately derived.'[37]

Nobel scientist Alexis Carrel said, 'Man is a material being, but belongs also to another world which extends beyond space-time.' Hans Driesh, a nineteenth-century biologist, thought of a 'fourth cause', 'a trans-temporal factor', 'which acted on the physical system but was not itself part of it.' He called this 'entelechy'. Then the British scientist J. G. Bennet offered the concept of a fifth dimension called 'eternity-dimension', which is behind all fourth dimensional matter-energy of the space-time world.[38]

Vedanta says that this space-time universe of matter arises from the non-material source of all creation, viz. Brahman, which is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute.

Intuition: The Common Basis of Vedanta and Science

Vedanta, like its source, the Vedas, means 'the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times.'[39] The Vedantist claims that the truths discovered by them are universal, since they are realized not through sense perception but through the pure heart, the pure mind, the pure intellect (*hṛdā manīṣā manasā abhiklṛptaḥ*: *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, 4. 17), by relationless intuition, or *nirvicāra*, or *nirvikalpa prajñā* (Vyāsa bhāṣya on *Patanjali Yoga Sūtras*, 1. 44). Einstein admitted that his great discoveries were born of 'intuitive leap', because 'the mere collection or recorded phenomena never suffices.'[40] Sense-data based positivism, Heisenberg realized, 'makes the mistake of refusing to see the overall connection.'[41] Nobel physicist Hideki Yukawa admitted the same truth in his book *Creativity & Intuition*. A

hundred years ago Vivekananda declared in the West: 'The senses cheat you day and night. Vedanta found that out years ago; modern science is just discovering the same fact.'[42] That is why Vivekananda's idea that relativity is space-time-causation was found by Michael Talbot to be a superior exposition of relativity than Herman Minkowiski's (also Einstein's), who failed to accept non-causality as a basic concept. 'Vivekananda further expresses a view that has become the backbone of Quantum Theory. There is no such thing as causality', writes Talbot.[43]

Maya: Uncertainty and the Basic Contradiction at the Basis of the Physical World

Modern physics has discovered some basic contradictions in our understanding of external reality. Says physicist Fritjof Capra:

> We can never say that an atomic particle exists at a certain place, nor can we say it does not exist. Being a probability pattern, the particle has tendencies to exist in various places and thus manifest a strange kind of physical reality between existence and non-existence.

Physicist Robert Oppenheimer explains further:

> If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say 'no'; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say 'no'.[44]

The *Īśā Upaniṣad* says: 'The ultimate reality is near and yet far. It is both moving and non-moving. It is both within everything and outside everything.'

Modern physics has discovered that particles behave as waves and waves as particles; that a single particle is also the reflection of the whole universe; that objective reality, locality, or causality though apparently real, is yet illusory; that we know what happens at the end of the reaction, but never know exactly how it happens, because all sub-atomic phenomena are like an 'un-openable watch', as Einstein said.

Stephen Hawking predicted that the incredible density of a black hole (where the density is stronger that a neutron star with a density of 10^{14} grams per cubic centimetre) could change the 'virtual particles' with negative energy to 'real' particles with positive energy.[45] Maya is, according to Vedanta,

aghaṭana ghaṭana paṭīyasi (expert in making things happen without a local cause).[46] It is both existent and nonexistent (*tattvānyatvābhyām anirvacanīya*). Vivekananda says:

> ...Maya is not a theory for the explanation of the world; it is simply a statement of facts as they exist, that the very basis of our being is contradiction, that everywhere we have to move through this tremendous contradiction....[47]

Modern Science Discovers a Holistic Universe (*Sat eva somya idam agre āsīt ekam eva advitīyam*: *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6. 2. 1)

General relativity says that wherever there is a massive body, there will be a gravitational field, and this field will manifest itself as the curvature of the space surrounding that body. In the cosmic universe, therefore, empty space and solid matter are inseparably related. 'According to Mach's principle, this interaction reaches out to the universe at large to the distant stars and galaxies', writes Fritjof Capra.[48] This unity and inter-relation between material objects is more striking at the sub-atomic level.

Physicist John Wheeler speaks of the entire material universe as 'quantum foam'[49] in which every particle floats like foam on a fundamental quantum field, and where every particle is linked with every other particle in what he terms 'quantum interconnectedness'. Wheeler also offers the idea of super space in which everything is interconnected in a deeper way. 'Matter, change, electromagnetism and other fields are only manifestations of bending of space.'[50] '...Vacuum is a froth of particles and fields... Space is foamlike', says Wheeler.[51]

Arthur Koestler coined the word 'holon' to describe a sub-atomic particle, since each of them is inextricably connected with the *whole* of the universe. Each particle reflects the whole, as it were. Physicist David Bohm has used this concept of holon in his new theory of matter, where the fundamental background is, according to him, an 'implicate order', and the external universe (the explicate order) is only a manifestation in space-time of the implicate order. What is this implicate order made of? It is made of 'that which is', says

Bohm. 'Creations of names and forms are like foam on the infinite ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute', says the *Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka*.[52]

Nearly a century ago Swami Vivekananda declared to the rationalists of the West: '...the modern physical researches are tending more and more to demonstrate that what is real is but the finer; the gross is simply appearance.' And '...God must be both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. Not only is He the creator, but He is also the created. He Himself is this universe.'[53]

Bell's Theorem: The Underlying Unity Behind the Universe (*Mayī sarvamidam protam sūtre maṇigaṇā iva*: *Bhagavad Gita*, 7. 7)

Einstein proposed the 'Einstein-Podolowsky-Rosen' (EPR) Effect in order to invalidate Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and asserted that if the Uncertainty Principle is correct then the world must be fundamentally interconnected. In 1964, physicist J. S. Bell of CERN gave a mathematical formulation to the EPR effect.

Physicist John Clauser and Freedman, who successfully experimented on Bell's Theorem in 1972, proved that two similar photons (in the experiment with twin photon pairs) always and instantaneously communicate with each other. Even when the twin photons are theoretically separated by an astronomical distance (a distance that takes light to travel several seconds), the condition of one photon is immediately conveyed to its twin. Alain Aspect, along with colleagues Jean Dalibard and Gerard Roger, added in 1982 and 1985 the refinements necessary to make the results unequivocal. They found that the communication was 'almost instantaneous'.[54] How could instantaneous communication between two distant objects be possible? Einstein's Theory of Relativity shows that 'faster than light' or 'super luminal communication' is impossible. Vedanta says, however, that no communication is necessary between two particles, as both are floating on the same background of one universal mind and one universal consciousness. 'I have interpenetrated this universe, like a thread connecting pearls', says Krishna in the *Gita* (7. 7).

Physicist Henry Stapp writes that 'Bell's Theorem is the most profound discovery of science.' It showed that the world is either fundamentally lawless or fundamentally inseparable.[55] Brian Josephson, Nobel physicist (1973), said

that 'one part of the universe may have the knowledge of another part — some kind of contact at a distance under certain conditions.'[56] The demolition of pure objectivity and locality startled the old generation. Philosopher Carl Popper wrote about the 'shattering reality' to physicist Clauser:

> I still cannot believe that objectivity + locality is untenable. In fact, I do not think that Bohr would expect it, in spite of the fact that he rejected Einstein's pleading for OL. It is only now, due to Bell and to your group, that the implications of QM become clear.[57]

Geoffrey Chew commented that the unity of space-time and everything else was there before creation through the big bang. It was a state of singularity, as Oxford physicist Roger Penrose termed it. The same unity will again prevail after this universe dwindles down to black holes. It is only during the middle term of a created universe that our thinking moves in the Cartesian dualism of space and time, of matter and matter, of matter and mind.[58] This dualism caused, according to A. D. Reincourt, 'the schizophrenic culture of Western civilization.'[59] A hundred years earlier Vivekananda asserted this unity of existence:

> This is another great theme of the Vedanta, this Oneness of life, this Oneness of everything...this ignorance is the idea of manifoldness, this separation between man and man, between nation and nation, between earth and moon, between moon and sun.... But the Vedanta says this separation does not exist, it is not real. It is merely apparent, on the surface. In the heart of things there is Unity still.[60]

And that unity is God.

Universality is the True Individuality
(*Aham brahmāsmi*: *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1. 4. 10)

Geoffrey Chew wrote:

> It was during the fifties, while I was applying Fermi's ideas to the structure of nuclear particles that I became aware that within every particle there is a sense in which every other particle resides. I was amazed that this

essential aspect of quantum theory had not been emphasized by my teachers.[61]

David Bohm also wrote:

> The essential new quality implied by the quantum theory is non-locality, i.e., that a system cannot be analyzed into parts whose basic properties do not depend upon the whole system... this leads to a new notion of unbroken wholeness of the universe.[62]

The Vedantic Mahāvākyas, or great utterances, such as *Aham brahmāsmi* (I am Brahman) indicate the fundamental unity between the microcosm and the macrocosm. As the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1. 2. 20) says: *Aṇoraṇīyānmahato mahīyān*, 'Smaller than the smallest, bigger than the biggest.' Erwin Schrödinger wrote as early as 1925 of this very idea:

> This life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of this existence, but in a sense the 'whole'...this, as we know, is what the Brahmins express in that sacred mystic formula which is yet so simple, so clear, Tat Twam Asi, This is you. Or again, in such words as 'I am in the east, I am in the west, I am below and above. I am this whole world'.[63]

What then is our individuality? Almost like an Upaniṣadic rishi, Geoffrey Chew says:

> According to quantum theory, even if we do not talk, even if we do not look at each other, you affect me, and I affect you.... Your electrons and my electrons are only approximately distinguishable. In denying objectivity, quantum mechanics denies absolute status to your individuality. The only individual is the entire universe.[64]

Vivekananda declared in 1893 at the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago:

> Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one little continuously changing body in an unbroken ocean of matter; and Advaita (unity) is the necessary conclusion with my other counterpart, soul.[65]

Science Approaches Advaita Vedanta

Quantum physics, especially the discovery of the Uncertainty Principle in 1927, led scientists far beyond the so-called observation-experiment-inference method of science. Arthur Eddington felt that after 1927 science for the first time had to enter into the realm of mysticism. Niels Bohr said that the Uncertainty Principle has forced scientists to think once again 'what the word understanding really means'. Sommerfield called it 'atomysticism'.[66] In later years, Heisenberg met Tagore in India, and while discussing Vedanta, came to know that all the strangely new ideas of quantum mechanics, like non-causality, non-objectivity, and non-locality, were not crazy but 'supported by a "whole culture" backed by Indian philosophy'.[67]

Schrödinger affirmed monism, or Advaita Vedanta, as the final philosophy emerging out of today's science:

> In all the world, there is no kind of framework within which we can find consciousness in the plural. This is something we construct because of the temporal plurality of the individuals, but it is a false construction.... The only solution for this conflict, in so far as any is available to us at all, lies in the ancient wisdom of the Upaniṣads.[68]

Physicist David Bohm said:

> Scientific research moves towards the Absolute by studying the relative in its inexhaustible multiplicity and diversity.[69]

Quoting the English mathematician Hardy at an international physicists' symposium, in the presence of physicists such as Heisenberg, Dirac, Wigner, and others, Sir C. P. Snow said:

> The excellence of a religion is inversely proportional to its number of Gods.... Catholics have four Gods. Churchmen having three Gods and the Monotheists having only one God.[70]

Advaita Vedanta worships no God, but affirms the eternal existence of one ultimate non-physical substratum of all existence, Brahman.

Newtonian and classical science, which began with a dualism of matter and matter, and matter and mind, is today forced to accept a holistic background,

an all-pervading consciousness, behind the universe, where matter and matter, and matter and mind, are all merged. The new paradigm of science is a holistic paradigm, as Ken Wilber explained in the book *The Holographic Paradigm*. Fritjof Capra wrote:

> Scientists will not need to be reluctant to adopt a holistic framework, as they are often today, for fear of being unscientific. Modern physics will have shown them that such a framework would be not only scientific, it would be consistent with the most advanced scientific theories of physical realities.[71]

It was Vivekananda's mission to bring about a meeting of science and Advaita Vedanta. 'Science and religion will meet and shake hands', he said.[72] A. D. Reincourt thinks that after Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta in the language of modern science, 'Indian mysticism has evolved...as the science of physics itself' leading towards an 'inevitable convergence of the two.'[73]

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The Ramakrishna Movement and Christian Thought

DR. K. P. ALEAZ

THE RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT is one of the few modern spiritual movements which have had constructive interaction with Christianity at different levels — theological, mystical, and social. In the present article an attempt is made to study this interaction at the theological level. It is divided into two sections. The first section is on the inspiration Sri Ramakrishna's life and thought provides for conceiving Pluralism as a viable perspective in a Christian theology of religions. The Pluralist Christology suggested by the swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission is discussed in the second section.

The Pluralist Perspective of Sri Ramakrishna — An Inspiration for a Viable Christian Theology of Religions

The theology of religions enquires into how from the perspective of one's own religious faith, a person can account for the diversity of the world's religious quest and commitment. There are four schools of thought prevalent among Christians on this issue. In the opinion of the Exclusivist School,[1] one's own religious faith is the sole criterion by which other faiths are understood and evaluated. Other religious paths are defective and one's own faith is the only valid path to liberation. An either/or model of truth is adopted here and the room for mutual enrichment between religions is ruled out. The Inclusivist approach[2] affirms the salvific presence of God in other religions while still maintaining that one's own religious faith is the definitive and authoritative

revelation of God. Inclusivism accepts the divine presence in other religions but rejects them as not being sufficient for liberation apart from one's own faith. All the truth in other religions belongs ultimately to one's own faith, which is its fulfilment. Pluralism[3] holds that other religions are equally salvific paths to the One God. The Ultimate Reality upon which the faith of all believers is focused in every religion is the same, though interpretations of its essential nature may vary. Truth-claims for this school are of a complementary nature and not of a conflicting nature. Pluralistic Inclusivism[4] inspires each religious faith to be pluralistically inclusive, i.e., on the one hand each living faith is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to its conceptual content, and on the other hand inclusivism is to transform its meaning to witness the fulfilment of the theological and spiritual contents of one's own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths.

Of these four schools of the theology of religions, Sri Ramakrishna stood firmly for pluralism. He was of the following conviction: 'God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true.'[5] He explained his own religious experience thus: 'I had to practise each religion for a time — Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of the Shāktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God towards whom all are travelling; but the paths are different.'[6] He said: 'All religions and all paths call upon their followers to pray to one and the same God. Therefore one should not show disrespect to any religion or religious opinion.'[7] 'It is by the will of God that different religions and opinions have come into existence.'[8]

Different religions address the same reality in different ways; it is like children addressing the same father differently; the elder ones may call him distinctly 'Baba' or 'Papa', but the babies can at best call him 'Ba' or 'Pa'. Surely the father will not mind. He knows that they too are calling him, only they cannot pronounce his name well.[9] People worship God according to their tastes and temperaments, and this is like different children eating different dishes cooked by their mother according to their taste.[10] Sri Ramakrishna's conviction was that all the different religious paths lead to the same goal. He explained this through the following analogies: reaching the roof through different ways;[11] coming to Dakshineswar through different ways;[12] reaching the reservoir of Immortality through different means.[13]

So according to Sri Ramakrishna it is not good to harbour malice against other paths; it is not good for the Shāktas, the Vaishnavas, and the Vedantins to quarrel among themselves.[14] He lamented: 'Hindus, Mussalmans, Brahmos, Shāktas, Vaishnavas, Shaivas, all quarrel with one another. They haven't the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is also Shiva and the Primal Shakti, and that it is He, again, who is called Jesus and Allah.'[15] He further said: 'He is indeed a real man who has harmonized everything. Most people are onesided. But I find that all opinions point to the One. All views... have that One for their centre. He who is formless is, again, endowed with form. The attributeless Brahman is my Father. God with attributes is my Mother.'[16] His standpoint is further clarified in the following words: 'All doctrines are only so many paths, but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion. Suppose there are errors in the religion that one has accepted; if one is sincere and earnest, then God Himself will correct those errors.'[17]

Thus the Pluralist perspective of Sri Ramakrishna will always be an inspiration for Christian thought which is open and liberal, especially when Indian Christians are struggling hard to shake off the traits of an arrogant colonial past imposed on them by Western missionaries. Now all are for a genuinely Indian Christianity. Of course, in India, before the advent of the aggressive Western mission, there existed a truly Indian Christianity among the St. Thomas Christians. It was from the time of the Synod of Diamper in 1599 that the Indian Church came under the bondage of the West. From an analysis of the Acts of this Synod[18] we are able today to infer the theology of religions of the St. Thomas Christians who have been living in India since the 1st century AD, and this resembled the present schools of Pluralism and Pluralistic inclusivism. In Kerala there existed the spirit of mutual acceptance among the communities of Hindus and Christians, and the prohibitions and restrictions imposed by the Synod of Diamper is a witness to this communal harmony. Act III, Decree 4 of the Synod says: 'Each one can be saved in his own law, all laws are right: this is fully erroneous and a most shameful heresy. There is no law by which we may be saved except the law of Christ our Saviour.' What we can infer from this is, the St. Thomas Christians upheld Pluralism in the theology of religions. They had the vision to see that a Hindu can be saved in his/her own *dharma*.

The theological position of the Indian Christian thinkers like Manilal C. Parekh and S. K. George can be considered as Pluralism. Manilal C. Parekh[19] in the final stage of his spiritual pilgrimage conceived Bhāgavata Dharma as a universal personal religion of devotion in which Christian devotion is one element among others. He included in it Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and all the religions which believe in God. It was his conclusion through experience that a change of religion is undesirable; one can be a disciple of Christ remaining in one's own community. There can be a 'Hindu Portrait of Jesus Christ', and Christianity is a *mokṣa dharma* and not a *samāja dharma*. S. K. George[20] believed in the possibility of a wider fellowship of religions, comprehending all diverse human apprehensions of the Divine, none seeking to destroy the other, but each helping its neighbour to fulfil itself by being faithful to its own inner light. He could not accept the exclusive divinity of Christ. He helped with the organization of the Inter-Religious Student Fellowship. He was of the view that what is common for all religions must be shared by people of all religions and what is distinctive for each religion also must be acknowledged by all. The contemporary Indian theologian S. J. Samartha, through his long experience of inter-religious dialogue, has also more or less come to the theological position of Pluralism. According to him, in the religio-cultural pluralism of India what has to be expounded is that the exclusive claim that *only* in Jesus Christ God has revealed His self *once-and-for-all* to redeem all humanity is not integral to the Gospel.[21] Neighbours of other faiths have also *their* stories to tell about their 'Lords' and 'Saviours' like Buddha, Ramakrishna, and Krishna.[22] His conviction is: 'The theory of multiple Avatars seems to be theologically the most accommodating attitude in a pluralist setting that permits recognising both the mystery of God and the freedom of people to respond to divine initiatives in different ways in different times.'[23]

In the West, prominent among the Christian propagators of Pluralism in the theology of religions are John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Hick[24] calls his pluralistic scheme a 'Copernican Revolution', i.e., according to him as the sun replaced the earth at the centre of the planetary universe, God replaces Christ and Christianity at the centre of the religious universe. Christians should maintain that God is the God of universal love, he is the Creator and Father of all humanity, and he wills the ultimate good and salvation of all people. Thus the theological axiom of the universal salvific will of God has to

be the fundamental tenet, and the traditional Christology which equates Jesus with God has to be rejected. The Incarnation has to be understood mythologically rather than literally, having relevance only within faith experience as a kind of practical truth as opposed to literal truth. That God has been encountered through Jesus is communicated mythologically by saying that he was God the Son incarnate. Hick would further say that in this approach world religions can be seen as encounters from different historical and cultural standpoints with the same infinite Divine Reality.

According to W. C. Smith[25] the idea that religions are mutually exclusive entities is not correct. He makes a distinction between 'faith' and 'cumulative traditions'. Faith is the personal response to Divine Reality whereas religion is seen as a way of life, obedience and piety and not a system of beliefs embodied in mutually exclusive ideological communities. Cumulative traditions are the multifarious changing historical and cultural expressions of faith. At the level of faith there is no monopolistic claims to truth; faith is the uniting factor between people of different traditions. God has been at work in different religious communities and faith enables all to participate in the saving activity of God. Christians know through their faith in Christ that God saves all; and so they have to substitute God for Christ at the centre. Religious truth is not truth in the abstract; it becomes true in a person's living faithfully the received enlightenment.

True, the majority of Christians are not Pluralists or Pluralistic Inclusivists,[26] but Exclusivists or Inclusivists. But the Exclusivists and Inclusivists are being challenged in India and the world over by the life and thought of Sri Ramakrishna to transcend their arrogance and ignorance and become open and *catholic* in the true sense of the term; and this impetus for change can be taken as an important contribution of the Ramakrishna Movement to Christian thought. Simultaneously Sri Ramakrishna, and through him the Ramakrishna Movement, strengthens the theological contribution of Christian Pluralists in India and abroad.

A Pluralist Christology — One of the Precious Gifts from the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission

Once Pluralism or Pluralistic Inclusivism is welcomed as a viable Christian theology of religions, then the door is open for a fresh understanding of the

person and function of Jesus in the light of it; and this is what is very badly needed for the Christians in India and the world over. The Ramakrishna Movement has accomplished a remarkable contribution in this regard for the benefit of Christians.[27]

1) Shift of emphasis on meanings regarding the person of Jesus

Regarding Jesus' person, Swami Vivekananda says that Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Ramakrishna are just a few among the many Incarnations. Among the incarnated personalities such as Zoroaster, Moses, Buddha, Krishna, Jesus, Mohammed, Luther, and Ramakrishna, some are called God and some Prophet. The difference between a human person and Christ is a difference in manifestation, but as Absolute Being there is no difference between the two. When intelligence is perfect we get the Incarnation — the Christ. Jesus was a person who felt and realized God intensely. Still the Christs are Teachers of teachers; they can transform us into saints. If the Swami as an Oriental has to worship Jesus of Nazareth, there is only one way left to him, that is, to worship him as God and nothing else. The Absolute is unknowable; we see It through the great Incarnations which are manifestations of the Absolute; we see the Father through the Son. But mere worship of Buddha or Christ will not save a person; God alone can give us freedom. Jesus and others like him are free spirits and hence they took human form, not by the compulsion of their past actions but just to do good to humankind.[28] According to Swami Abhedananda, Jesus, Krishna, Buddha, and others became Saviours of the world in the sense that they communicated to the unawakened souls the knowledge of the Atman, which is the message of salvation. Among these great ones, though Moses, Confucius, and Mohammed are called Prophets of the Lord, Zoroaster and Lao-Tze are regarded as Messengers of God, and Krishna, Buddha, Christ, and Ramakrishna are classed with the Saviours of the world; each of these has fulfilled his divine mission by setting an example, by showing the path to perfection.[29] The Incarnations of God are born with a knowledge of higher spiritual laws and truths; from the very first they recognize the oneness of the individual soul with the universal Spirit; they are personifications of Divinity on earth.[30] Vedanta exhorts all to follow Christ's path and to worship him as the Son of God, the Saviour of humankind, and the Redeemer of the world.[31]

According to Swami Akhilananda,[32] Jesus the Christ is one of the Incarnations of God; he came to re-establish the spirit of religion in the Jews and other people of the Roman empire. An Incarnation shows us that the background of the world is divine, as the eternal subject of experience is also divine. In other words the subject and object of experience are basically one. They also demonstrate how to live on the basis of this knowledge. They are rulers of māyā (*māyādhīśa*), while we are the slaves of māyā (*māyādhīna*). There is an important difference even between saints and Incarnations. Whereas saints are at first bound souls who later become illuminated, the Incarnations are the veritable embodiment of divine light and power from the very beginning of their lives. The Divine Incarnations are embodiments of patience and forgiveness, love and sympathy. Moreover, being manifestations of God, they have the power of grace, the power of dispensing all limitations and weaknesses of a person and giving direct illumination to a sinner as well as a saint. The Hindu will agree with orthodox Christians, as opposed to 'liberalism', in regarding Christ as unique in comparison with ordinary human beings. As an Incarnation of God, Jesus was a yogi of the highest type, one who was thoroughly established in yoga, union with God. A yogi is one who can declare 'I am the Self', or 'I am Brahman', just as Jesus says 'I and my Father are one.' Jesus practised all the yogas — *karma*, *bhakti*, *rāja* and *jñāna*.

Swami Prabhavananda also mentions that Jesus taught all the yogas, giving special emphasis to *bhakti-yoga*. Further, he also conceived Jesus as one of the Avatars.[34] Though the word is incarnated in all beings, the word is made flesh in an Avatar in a special sense, the Avatar being the descent of God; they being born without karmas and above māyā, whereas, the ordinary person ascends towards God. It is not exclusive claims which make one an Avatar; it is the unique power to transmit spirituality and transform human lives by touch, look, or wish, and the revelation of his divinity in transfiguration that expose him as an Avatar. An Avatar does not originate the truth of God but only unfolds it. According to Swami Satprakashananda, both Hinduism and Christianity believe that it is from the word or *vāk* that everything in the universe, including the Divine Incarnation, has arisen. Jesus is one of the many Incarnations[35] and it is unimportant whether a spiritual teacher is considered a Prophet, a Messenger, or worshipped as the Incarnation of God; if one faithfully follows the teachings of any of the spiritual leaders of the world, he/

she will certainly be saved. There are two mighty streams of love in this world: one, that of the supreme Lord seeking human beings, and the other, human hearts seeking Him, and the Incarnations are the confluence of these two mighty streams.[36] Two Incarnations, Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna, had constant visions of God and through *samādhi* they realized the identity and unity of the individual self with the Supreme Self. Swami Ranganathananda also extols Jesus as one of the Divine Incarnations, whose power is beyond the reach even of saints.[37] As a Divine Incarnation, Jesus had much compassion and the power to redeem (Luke, 7.41-50; John, 8.7-11). The power behind the words 'thy sins art forgiven' is the power of saints.[38] The divine power working through Jesus is specially revealed in his declaration in Mathew (11.28-30) which is identical with Sri Krishna's statement in the *Bhagavad Gita* (18. 66).[39]

Thus we can identify a development in the conception of the person of Christ in Neo-Vedanta. The later Neo-Vedantins — Swami Akhilananda, Swami Prabhavananda, and Swami Ranganathananda — are more emphatic on the role of Jesus as an Incarnation as distinguished from an individual person. According to them, Jesus is one of the Avatars or the descents of God, born without karma and above māyā. An Avatar has the unique power to transmit spirituality, transform human lives by touch, look, or wish, and reveal his divinity through transfiguration. As stated before, there is an important difference even between saints and Incarnations. Saints are at first bound souls who later become illuminated, but Incarnations are the veritable embodiments of divine light and power from the very beginning of their lives. As a Divine Incarnation, Jesus had much compassion and the power to redeem. Also, as an Incarnation, Jesus was a yogi of the highest type who practised all the yogas. Jesus as an Incarnation had the constant vision of God, and through *samādhi* he realized the identity and unity of the individual self with the Supreme Self.

But we note that in the earlier Neo-Vedantins like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Abhedananda, the emphasis is more on presenting Jesus as an ideal, perfect human person. The difference between a human person and Christ is a difference in manifestation; but as Absolute Being there is no difference between the two. The resources of God which were available to Jesus are open to all, and if we struggle as he did, we will develop the God in us. What Jesus does is to set an example, by showing the path of perfection.

True, those earlier Neo-Vedantins also had no problem in worshipping Jesus as Divine, as one who reveals the Absolute, as a Herald of truth on earth. So we can say that Neo-Vedanta keeps a balance between following the path shown by Christ and worshipping him. Jesus is simultaneously a Divinity for us to worship and an ideal for us to imitate.

2) A new understanding on the function of Jesus

Neo-Vedantic Christology is the supreme example from India for the fact that Indians cannot find any meaning in the atonement theories. It is the view of Neo-Vedantic Christology that the atonement theory is a distortion of the Gospel of God in Jesus. Swami Vivekananda, Swami Abhedananda, and Swami Ranganathananda emphatically reject the atonement theory. Swami Vivekananda pointed out that Christianity considers the human person as a sinner, a worm, and that is why it could not understand the message of potential divinity implied in Jesus' saying 'I and my Father are one.' Human sacrifice was a Jewish idea, and to fit the gentle and loving Jesus into Jewish beliefs, the idea of human sacrifice in the form of atonement, or as a human scapegoat, by Christianity, was really unfortunate. The problem with Christianity is its idea that religion consists in doctrines. It has the peculiar doctrine that the whole world was born because Adam ate the apple and now there is no way of escape other than belief in Jesus Christ, that he died to save us. For the Christians the problem is how to escape the wrath of the terrible God.[40]

According to Swami Ranganathananda, the universal message of Jesus which comprises the idea of the indwelling divinity, of divine grace, universal ethics, and spiritual realization was distorted by the Christian Church through fettering it in cast-iron dogmas of the innate vileness of human nature, the 'scape goat' and the 'atonement', physical resurrection and the second advent, the earthly kingdom and the imminence of the Day of Judgement, which are purely tribal in their scope.[41] The lost universality of the message of Jesus can be regained now under the guidance of the philosophy of Vedanta. Swami Abhedananda also rejected the traditional Christian understandings of sin and salvation as dogmatic, unsatisfactory, illogical, and contradictory. Christians mean by salvation, redemption from sin through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the son of God. But Jesus the Christ did not teach the idea of

vicarious atonement; what he taught was 'the Kingdom of Heaven is within you'; 'I and my Father are one.'[42] Our true nature is Spirit and sin is nothing but selfishness or the ego-sense caused by the ignorance of this true nature. The appearance of the Atman as the limited ego is the fall. Through Satan, Ignorance, the Eve or *buddhi* or understanding, is overcome, and that is the spiritual meaning of the fall according to Vedanta. And the fallen ego will recover its absolute state through the help of the Atman, which is described as Christ. The true Saviour of the apparent ego is the Atman and the way of salvation is the knowledge of the Atman.[43]

According to Swami Akhilananda, the cross is the expression of spiritual power or soul-force through which alone we can conquer evil. The cross teaches us that through aggression we cannot conquer evil. The cross symbolizes the conquest of the lower passions as well.[44] Resurrection symbolizes the changeless immortal life; it is the realization of the abiding presence of God in us attainable by all through the crucifixion of the empirical selves.[45] Swami Satprakashananda shows that through his crucifixion,[46] Jesus Christ teaches us to overcome the body-idea by the spiritual conquest of the flesh, to overcome the lower self by the higher spiritual self. He also demonstrates the very perfection of the teaching of non-resistance of evil in his crucifixion. Through resurrection[47] Jesus Christ affirms that the human person is really spirit; death can take life out of the body, but it cannot affect the spiritual Self of a person. Resurrection is the resurrection of the subtle body made of subtle elements.

Though Neo-Vedantic Christology may agree that as a Divine Incarnation Jesus has the power to redeem, transmit spirituality, and transform human lives, according to it, this is not realized the way the Christian Church conceives the atonement. In the Neo-Vedantic view, the Christian doctrines, especially the doctrine of atonement, goes against the spirit of Jesus. What Jesus does is to show us the way to become perfect, to show us our true nature which is divine, to bring us to realization which involves the regaining of one's lost selfhood. The cross signifies dying to the lower self and resurrection means rising to the higher universal Self. The cross is the expression of spiritual power or soul-force through which alone we can conquer evil. The cross is the very perfection of the teaching of non-resistance of evil. Resurrection affirms that the human person is really Spirit. Resurrection means the resurrection of the subtle body of subtle elements. Above all, it is the affirmation of the Neo-

Vedantic Christology that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are not so much historical events which occurred once upon a time, but as universal processes of spiritual life which are being continually accomplished in human lives. Following the example of Jesus, we can also die and be resurrected, and Jesus as an Avatar can of course help us in our endeavour. Thus we may both worship Jesus and follow his path.

Following Swami Vivekananda and other Neo-Vedantins, a number of Indian Christian theologians have tried to understand the person and work of Jesus in terms of Advaita Vedanta. Consequently, it is accepted today that the atonement theory is not the only way to understand the work of Christ. The present author has expounded elsewhere[49] the function of Jesus as manifesting the all-pervasive (*sarvagatatvam*), illuminative (*jyotiḥ*), and unificative (*ekīkaraṇam*) power of the supreme Atman; as manifesting the fact that the Supreme Brahman as Pure Consciousness (*prajñāna-ghanam*) is the witness (*sākṣi*) and Self of all (*sarvātmā*); and as manifesting the eternally present (*nityasidhasvabhāvam*) human liberation.

Conclusion

In Christian theology there is urgent need for fresh air. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the works of the scholarly Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission are very helpful in getting this. They help in two ways: on the one hand, the life and thought of Sri Ramakrishna is a continuous inspiration for a Pluralist perspective in the Christian theology of religions, and on the other, the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission provide a new insightful Christology, going beyond the sectarianism and exclusivism of the atonement theory as well as Christomonism.

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Vivekananda and Western Philosophy

JEAN RAOUL SANSEN

Vivekananda's objectives are, above all, religious. However, philosophy offered him ways of expressing himself which are more internationally accessible. By presenting his intuitions in an abstract and universal form, he was able to more easily find a common language with his Western audiences.

Even from his college years, Vivekananda expressed a deep interest in philosophy. In those days, Western thought was already questioning traditional beliefs. This satisfied an inner part of his temperament, which associated the sense of the absolute with a natural scepticism about all that is relative. So, his faith was all the stronger for his scepticism. The teaching that he imparted never sought to rely on beliefs, rather only on life experience. The introduction to *Rāja-Yoga* presents this choice very clearly. 'All our knowledge is based upon experience', and as a consequence 'all the religions of the world have been built upon that one universal and adamantine foundation of all our knowledge — direct experience.'[1]

A century later, this reference to experience appears even more significant. Not only does it give a better response to scepticism, but it also allows both East and West to compare their religious experiences and to see at last how similar they are. By teasing out and bypassing ordinary forms of psychology, religion becomes a science of the Spirit. Thanks to the views afforded us by Jung's psychoanalysis, we see that the mind possesses this religious dimension. Research of this kind is all the more important at a time when matter seems to slip away from us. Vivekananda was one of the first to show that the science of

matter progressively dissolves the object.[2] Since then, quantum physics has confirmed this trend, reducing matter to an energy interplay whose effective action is linked to the thought of the observer. One no longer knows whether one is in the presence of material elements or simply manifestations of the Spirit.

As he witnessed the beginning of this reductive process, Vivekananda adopted a critical position with regard to the material world. What is referred to here is a critique in the precise sense that Kant gave to this term. Critique is not a negative and entirely sceptical attitude; rather, it is an evaluation which prudently appreciates the origin, meaning, and reach of its object. More precisely, it is an object of thought rather than a thing, since it is constructed by thought. The critical revolution, justifiably compared to that of Copernicus, makes the world revolve around the Spirit instead of placing the Spirit in a world existing in an independent manner. Vivekananda thus agrees with the first part of Kant's thought, but adds that this had been taught by the Vedanta long ago.[3] He even wrote to his friend Max Müller to point out Shankara's texts on this subject. Time, space, and causation are simple modes of thought which the Indian tradition attributes to the influence of māyā.

The ideal proposed by Vivekananda is to rediscover the Absolute, which remains hidden by this causal and space-time conditioning. Spiritual experience allowed him to sense the value and power of this Absolute. Kant and his successors did not have such experience and did not perceive that spiritual power is only attainable through intuition and therefore precedes logical processes. They allowed themselves to be guided by logic in order to construct a rational world based on a system of concepts. All these views would be perfect if the Spirit could be reduced to reason, and had as its only task the ordering of phenomena.

The prolegomenon of criticism and idealism interested Vivekananda, but he could not accept reducing Spirit to reason because 'there are much higher states of existence beyond reasoning.'[4] This opposition becomes more radical when one considers Hegel's dialectic. The German philosopher views indeterminate existence not as a creative power, but as a simple concept, the weakest of all, which can be enriched through the development of definitions. This distances him from Indian thought in which *Sat* is one of the aspects of Brahman. Hegel was aware of this profound discord, and even critiqued in a very negative

manner the texts of the *Bhagavad Gita*. In his turn, Vivekananda drew attention to the dangers inherent in Hegel's philosophy. By misunderstanding the absolute value of indeterminate existence, Hegel places the individualized form above the One; this means giving preference to the world and *samsāra* and renouncing the quest for salvation.[5]

Schopenhauer correctly pointed out that Hegel's dialectic reversed the fundamental order of values. Contrary to his way of thinking, he even sought a link with Indian religious intuitions. However, Vivekananda's evaluation of this attempt is rather critical because 'he stands on reason only and rationalizes the Vedas'.[6] This is a little surprising, since Schopenhauer refers above all to intuition. But he then describes it in an abrupt and rational way, which distorts the meaning and does not conform to the Vedanta. The Indian ideal of giving up desire is not a denial of life, but only an avoidance of *samsāra* (everyday life), so as to attain eternal life. In other words, in order to discover the foundation of will, one denies its modalities. Vivekananda presented this distinction in a very precise way: 'The will of man is bound, but that which is the foundation of that will is eternally free.'[7]

Of course, this foundation is the Absolute, envisaged here in its power of expression. The freedom of the Absolute is not beholden to the forms in which it chooses to manifest itself, and this appears in the unforeseeable movement of life. Vivekananda thus concurs with the hypothesis of biological evolution, which was central to numerous debates from the time of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Western nations, sensitive to the teachings of the Bible, spent decades coming to realize that Genesis should have been interpreted in a symbolic manner. Accustomed to symbols, Vivekananda had no problem with this. Above all, he clearly perceived that the modest and animal origin of Man suggests in no way that the inferior explains the superior, or that matter is the real cause of the emergence of thought. He does not confuse anteriority in time with metaphysical principle. On the contrary, this unity of life across the ages displays its power even more, which surpasses all the forms where it appears: 'Behind all this vast mass of what we call life… we find existing a certain unity. Every day we find that the wall that was thought to be dividing one thing and another is being broken down, and all matter is coming to be recognised by modern science as one substance manifesting in different ways and in various forms; the one life that runs through all like a continuous chain….'[8]

Bergson would develop a very similar view a few years later in his *Evolution Crèatrice* (1907). The very title of this book indicates that the train of life does not result from physico-chemical causes, but rather from a creative impulse whose origin is spiritual. However, this spirituality is limited because it maintains the existence of a matter that is distinct from the Spirit. The impulse of life runs through it, but it comes from an impulsion that is divine in its origin, and not from an immanent eternal presence of the Absolute. Bergson remains a dualist, whilst Vivekananda applies the non-dualism of the Advaita Vedanta in the area of science. In pursuing this examination of matter to its logical conclusion, he reduces it to Life, which is itself the activity of the Absolute within time.

Bergson's stances are sometimes quite close to those of Vivekananda. He considers the Spirit as an impulse that creates forms which can then in turn be superseded, and this power manifests itself in our minds through intuitions, which are deeper than reasoning. After much research, Bergson turned finally towards mysticism, as he explained in 1932 in *Les Deus sources de la morale et de la religion*. Clearly preferring Christian mysticism, he was also interested in all religious experiences. Up until this time, he knew about the teachings of Vivekananda, which he had undoubtedly discovered whilst reading Romain Rolland's significant essay on Vivekananda published in 1930.[9] Bergson was visibly impressed by his account: 'C'est en effet une charitè ardente, c'est un mysticisme comparable au mysticisme chrètien, que nous trouvons chez un Ramakrishna ou un Vivekananda' (It is indeed a burning sense of charity, it is a mysticism similar to Christian mysticism, that we find in Ramakrishna or Vivekananda).[10] But he remains conditioned by his Western education to the point of attributing to Western influence this tendency to express love for others through direct action in helping them. Certainly Vivekananda accepts resorting to new methods for resolving social problems. But the *Bhagavad Gita* had already developed a theory of action, and the karma-yoga had since time immemorial been one of the paths of Indian spirituality. In fact, Bergson insists upon linking mysticism and action, because, according to him, time possesses a veritable creative energy. God intervenes at the beginning of time, but he does not continue to guide its progress, as would an immanent God whose eternity inspires all our life. Bergson refuses to subordinate time to eternity, and this refusal gives human action too much independence.

For Vedantic thinkers, modern philosophies are a little disappointing, because they always fall into the trap of illusion. Bergson restores the power of the Spirit, but it is in order to immediately disperse it into units of individual will which seek to create an edifice in time. One finds the same trend in most recent philosophers who have been influenced by existentialism. Formerly, Kant and idealist thinkers had sensed more accurately that time and space are dependent upon the unity of the universal Spirit, thus also dependent on its eternity. Yet they had reduced Spirit to reason. This enabled them only to order phenomena without opening any way to discover the motion of life from which they came.

Vivekananda would have undoubtedly found more satisfaction in Platonism and Neoplatonism. However, college study in his era concentrated little upon these ancient philosophies, and this limited his contact with them. Plato gives phenomena their real meaning by seeing in them simple images which demonstrate an eternal reality in an incomplete manner. Plotinus and Neoplatonism are even closer to the Vedanta, when they develop their intuition of the One. Having been also founded on a religious experience, this philosophy fits in quite naturally with that of the Upaniṣads. Vivekananda draws on this Indian tradition to show the road to the metaphysical unity and he cites the text: 'He who in this world of many sees that One, ...he who in the world of shadows catches that Reality, unto him belongs eternal peace.'[11] Plotinus could have written the same text, because the One of Neoplatonism is also the unique Reality from which all the semi-existences of phenomena are hung. Nothing can be added to this Reality by simple addition, as is the case for philosophies which imagine a creation outside the Absolute. The world goes forth from this Absolute, not by adding, but through internal division which is also internal in each creature. The One remains central to each mind, even if the mind does not know it. This One alone guarantees our relative unity, and we do not possess an individual unity which could be peculiar to us.

Vivekananda presented similar views in his lecture on the 'Real Nature of Man': 'If the soul is infinite, there can be only one Soul.'[12] The ordinary and singular individual, he who believes himself to be different from others, is an illusion, pure and simple: 'What is individuality? I should like to see it.'[13] But it is possible to speak of the individual in another sense, in an etymological sense. The individual is he who is not divided. Only God is worthy of this

description and He is the immanent God who invites us to reach His unity, the unique unity. Vivekananda thus continues: 'We are not individuals yet.... He alone lives whose life is in the whole universe.... It is only the Spirit that is the individual, because it is infinite.'[14]

This comes round to saying that the One is also the Universal: 'Our reality... consists in the Universal, and not in the limited.'[15] The objective is to realize the Universal by going beyond dualities, correlations, and 'all the pairs of opposites.'[16] It is a kind of synthesis very different from that of Hegel, because it does not seek to enrich concepts but to attain a pure state of existence, removed from any concept. In making this effort we are allowed to discover 'the One Existence of the universe'[17] within ourselves. Modern idealism has missed this objective by following the road of concepts. However, Neoplatonism was very aware of this and described it as the return to the One.

In fact, the most evident sign of convergence between the Vedanta and Neoplatonism is the double movement, which for them amounts to the cycle of time. Firstly the plural manifestation of the One when He seems to be dispersed, and the subsequent return to the One. Vivekananda sometimes stressed the fact that evolution also supposes involution. He observed: 'It has been nearly demonstrated by researches into physical nature, that we are the outcome and manifestation of an absolute condition, ...and are going forward, to return to that absolute.'[18]

This complexity of evolution, which makes plurality appear in order to be finally superseded, is often misunderstood or debated. It makes many philosophers uneasy because it suggests that the world affirms its own negation and that salvation finds itself already written down in history. But several great traditions have discovered this double movement. It is brought to light by the Vedanta, by Neoplatonism, and also by Christian mysticism, when it sees in God the alpha and the omega, the origin and the end of the universe.

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Socio-Political Concepts of Swami Vivekananda

SANTWANA DASGUPTA

Introduction

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, a great religious leader and one of the greatest exponents of Vedanta, was also one of the greatest intellectuals and scholars of all times.[1] According to competent persons: 'Science, philosophy, and history had no secrets from the Swami.'[2] '...He was equally versed in history and political economy',[3] and 'he understood and studied the modern civilization with the combined insight of a sociologist, psychologist, historian, philosopher and mystic.'[4] And as an itinerant monk, he had the rare opportunity to acquire knowledge about the life of the masses all over the world directly. As Romain Rolland writes, 'He was as conversant with the knowledge of the pundits as with the problems of industrial and rural economy whereby the life of the people is controlled.'[5] And as Marie Louise Burke points out: '...He acquired the greatest familiarity with the institutions of the country, religious, political and social. Nor was this familiarity acquired through contact with the intellectuals alone... he spoke also with the labourers and farmers, his fingers were, as it were, on the pulse of the nation.'[6] Evidently Swami Vivekananda had profound knowledge of the working of the various social and political systems of the world.

However, the most important fact about him was that he was a prophet of human emancipation who sought to secure total emancipation of man from every kind of fetter and servitude — social, political, economic, and spiritual.

His socio-political philosophy is a part of his total philosophy of the emancipation of man, which has found expression in his exposition of Vedanta. Vivekananda wrote only one treatise on socio-political concepts, 'Modern India', but several ideas appear also in his 'East and West' and 'The Memoirs of European Travel'.[7] Besides, in his various lectures, letters, and interviews, he has given his assessment of the working of the different socio-political systems of the world and a glimpse of his own revolutionary socio-political philosophy.

The Failure of Politics as an Instrument for Human Welfare

It must be made clear at the outset that Vivekananda had little faith in politics as an instrument for human welfare. After making a keen study of history he observed, '...the political systems that we are struggling for in India have been in Europe for ages, have been tried for centuries, and have been found wanting.'[8] And again, 'One after another the institutions, systems, and everything connected with political government have been condemned as useless; and Europe is restless, does not know where to turn.'[9] Among Western thinkers, Emerson, Bertrand Russell, Toynbee, and Romain Rolland have expressed dissatisfaction with politics. Voicing this viewpoint, Roman Rolland observes:

> Our civilization in its dire peril has vainly invoked the spell of the great words : 'Right', 'Liberty', 'Co-operation', 'The Peace of Geneva', or 'Washington', but such words are void or filled with poisonous gas. Nobody believes in them.[10]

That political revolutions of the type of the French Revolution failed to deliver the goods, was also noticed by Vivekananda.[11] That subsequent revolutions, which took place in Russia, China, and some other countries, also proved to be failures is today well known to us.

Religion as an Instrument of Social Revolution

His deep historical insight led Vivekananda to discover in religion an alternative instrument of social revolution in India. 'Such changes, revolutionizing society', he observes, 'have been happening in India again and again,

only in this country they have been effected in the name of religion.... The Charvaka, the Jain, the Buddhist, Shankara, Ramanuja, Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj — of all these and similar other sects, the wave of religion, foaming, thundering, surging, breaks in the front, while in the rear follows the filling-up of social wants.'[12]

Obviously Vivekananda uses the words 'foaming', 'thundering', and 'surging' deliberately to impress upon us the tremendous revolutionary impact of the religious movements on society, effecting far-reaching changes in class relations, institutions and social arrangements. Citing an example he says:

> For Buddhism has shaken the thrones of all the oblation-eating gods and brought them down from their heavenly positions.... And to this Buddhahood, every man has the privilege to attain.... From the descent of the gods, as a natural consequence, the superiority of the priests who were supported by them is gone.[13]

Thus Buddhism served as an instrument of social revolution by overthrowing the power of the brahmins. Erich Fromm, the German born US psycho-analyst and sociologist, held the idea that a new society is possible only when in the process of its growth a new type of human being also comes into existence.[14] According to Vivekananda also the success of any social system depends on the quality of men it produces. He therefore laid great emphasis on man-making, and he was firm in his conviction that in this matter religion was the most efficient instrument. 'Religion is of deeper importance than politics', he said, 'since it goes to the root, and deals with the essential of conduct.'[15]

The Significance of Vedanta for Society

The whole of Vedanta was, in fact, summed up by Vivekananda in two basic principles: 1) The divinity of man, and 2) The essential spirituality of life. From this it follows that:

- Every state, every society, every religion must be based on the recognition of the all-powerful presence latent in man.
- In order to be fruitful, all human interests should be controlled and guided according to the ultimate truth of the spirituality of life.[16]

Thus, these Vedantic principles form the core of Vivekananda's socio-political philosophy and the foundation of all his basic socio-political concepts concerning society, state, secularism, government, liberty, equality, revolution, and nationalism. According to Vivekananda, 'the objective society' will always be a mixture of good and evil,[17] that is to say, it is always imperfect. Secondly, in his opinion, human evolution after a certain stage is not physical, but mental and spiritual.[18] And social laws are attempts to control the desire of man so that he is able to proceed along this path of evolution.[19] Finally, he was of the opinion, 'that society is the greatest where the greatest truth becomes practical.'[20]

It is evident that Vivekananda has given here a masterly analysis of the basic purposes and functions of society, as well as of its true and intrinsic nature.

Secularism as a Socio-political Concept

The concept of secularism has assumed great importance in present-day India as a solution to the problems of a multi-religious society. Prof. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, the eminent Indian sociologist, claimed that 'Vivekananda was the father of modern materialism in India'[21] since he laid great emphasis on secular activities for removing poverty and ignorance and attaining overall economic prosperity. Even in the 'Aims and Objectives' of the Ramakrishna Mission, he included the following apparently secular activities:

> (1) to train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge of sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses, (2) to promote and encourage arts and industries.[22]

Now the basis of reconciliation between the two incompatible ideologies — secular and spiritual — is to be found in Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta. Dwelling on this point, Sister Nivedita writes:

> If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally, ...all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular.[23]

Hence, to Vivekananda everything was sacred and nothing secular. Obviously, therefore, secularism to him was not rank materialism. A secular state to him was one which was based on the highest principles of spirituality.

An Ideal Polity Based on the Concept of Universal Religion

While defining the concept of universal religion in his paper on Hinduism at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893, Vivekananda pointed out:

> It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force will be created in aiding humanity to realise its own true divine nature.[24]

It is evident that an ideal polity according to Vivekananda is one which is based on the concept of universal religion and in this polity 'there is to be no other dogma but the divinity inherent in man and his capacity for infinite evolution.'[25]

The Revolutionary Concept of Man and of the State

The concept of the divinity of man is thus the core of the socio-political philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. According to this concept there is no limit to man's inherent strength and latent capacities. In the *Atharva Veda* man declares (XII. i. 54):

> Mighty am I, superior by name upon the Earth, all-conquering am I, completely conquering every region.

Actually, this might of man, his sovereignty over nature, is the essence of Vivekananda's revolutionary concept of man. 'Never forget the glory of human nature', he reminds us. 'We are the greatest God that ever was, or ever will be. Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which *I am*.'[26]

Being based on this revolutionary concept of man, Vivekananda's concept of the state, the coercive organ of society, is basically different from the absolutist concept of the state given by the idealistic philosophers — Aristotle, Hegel, Green, and Bosanquet. According to T. H. Green, who popularized the concept of the General Will as 'a new entity over and above the sum of individual wills... state is itself a real personality over and above the sum of the individual personalities.'[27] It follows that 'the actions of the state, insofar as they proceed from the general will, must always be irreproachably right in the sense that

they represent what is best in individual wills.'[28] It is clear, therefore, that the individuals cannot have any right which conflicts with the state.

According to Prof. Bimanbehari Mazumdar, the eminent Indian political scientist, Vivekananda was an idealist of the school of Green and Bosanquet[29] since he said, the 'individual's happiness is in the happiness of the whole; apart from the whole, the individual's existence is inconceivable.'[30] But that by the term 'individual' here Vivekananda meant the privileged few in power and by the term 'whole' he meant the underprivileged masses, is clear from his following statement: 'Whether the leadership of society be in the hands of those who monopolize learning or wield the power of riches or arms, the source of its power is always the subject masses.'[31] Hence, clearly Vivekananda was never an idealist of the school of Aristotle, Hegel, Green, and Bosanquet who sought to support the absolute authority of the state over the lives of the individuals.

In his 'Modern India' Vivekananda made it absolutely clear that when the interest of the multitude is overthrown and when 'oppression steps into the place of protection — sucking their blood in place of preservation, ...there soon follows a fierce contest between the king and his subjects, and by its reaction and convulsion are flung away the sceptre and the crown.'[32] Thus, according to Vivekananda, political revolutions are inevitable when there is dereliction of duty on the part of the state in safeguarding the interests of the common people.

The Organismic Theory of the State and the Right of the Individual

To Plato, Hobbes, and Rousseau and other thinkers of the organismic school, individuals are like the cells of an organism and therefore they cannot have any meaningful existence apart from the whole. Hence, individual rights cannot have priority over the interests of the state.

Vivekananda uses the same organic concept to prove that the rights of the individuals supersede those of the state and society. As he puts it: 'Accumulation of power is as necessary as its diffusion, or rather more so. The accumulation of blood in the heart is an indispensable condition for life; its non-circulation throughout the body means death.'[33] In short, society and the state exist for the benefit of the people, and not the people for the benefit of society or the state.

Different Concepts of Social Organization

According to Swami Vivekananda, a human society is in turn governed by the four castes — the priests, the soldiers, the traders, and the labourers — and each state has its glories as well as defects.[34]

In the first period, the priests (*brahmins*) ruled. Its glory was that the foundation of the sciences was laid. Its defects were that exclusive claims were made by them on hereditary grounds. Next comes the period of military (*kṣatriya*) rule when arts and culture flourished. But this rule is tyrannical and cruel. It is succeeded by the rule of the merchants (*vaiśyas*) when there is a good dissemination of culture since the merchant goes everywhere with his wares. But it is awful in its silent crushing and blood-sucking power. The last to come is the rule by the labourers (*śūdras*). Its advantage is equal distribution of physical comforts, its disadvantages (perhaps) lowering of culture.[35]

According to Vivekananda, 'if it is possible to form a state in which the knowledge of the first period, the culture of the military, the distributive spirit of the commercial, and the ideal of the equality of the last can all be kept intact minus their evil, it will be an ideal state.'[36] Obviously, this will be an ideal state since it will not be dominated by any particular class. But the realist in Vivekananda at once puts the question, 'Is it possible?' He himself realized that such an ideal state cannot be a reality in world which is ever imperfect.

According to Vivekananda, a society can do without its coercive organ only when all its members are good and moral. In his opinion a person who has killed all selfishness in him is a true *brahmin*. And he puts his view in the form of a question:

> If a country is altogether inhabited by such *brahmins*, by men and women who are spiritual and moral and good, is it strange to think of that country as being above and beyond all law? What police, what military are necessary to govern them?[37]

But in this ever-imperfect world it is not possible that all the members of a society will be good and moral at the same time. Hence, this concept of a stateless society is beyond humanity's reach and only a utopia.

Vivekananda does not consider rule by the few wise and virtuous to be desirable, and herein he differs from Aristotle and Plato, who highly eulogized

rule by the wise. According to him, if the society is made to give unconditional obedience to the path chalked by the virtuous and any deviation is punished, that society becomes nothing but a machine and the death of such a society is not far to seek.[38] Besides the few virtuous people who are in power gradually degenerate and start making exclusive claims over the good things of life and thereby get estranged from the people. Such a nation easily succumbs to foreign invaders.

Rule by monarchs who are dispensers of justice or dharma, like Rama, Yudhiṣṭhira, and Ashoka, is not any better. 'Such a nation', according to Vivekananda, 'being entirely dependent on the king for everything and never caring to exert itself for the common good or for self-defense, becomes gradually destitute of inherent energy and strength and its ruin is not far to seek.'[39]

Democracy: The Most Desirable Form of Government

According to Vivekananda, 'The voice of the ruled in the government of their land'[40] is the only form of government which is suitable for a mature society. 'It is the evidence of history', he observes, 'that at a certain time every society attains its manhood, when a strong conflict ensues between the ruling power and the common people. The life of the society, its expansion and civilization, depend on its victory or defeat in this conflict.'[41] Thus, unless the people's voice is heard in ruling the country, there may be a people's uprising.

Vivekananda, however, did not consider the Western democracies to be approaching the ideal. Giving his assessment, he observed:

> They that have money have kept the government of the land under their thumb, are robbing the people and sending them as soldiers to fight and be slain on foreign shores, so that in case of victory, their coffers may be full of gold bought by the blood of the subject people on the field of battle.[42]

Thus, due to the domination of the moneyed class, the people's voice in the government was ineffective. The following observations made by Vivekananda throw more light on the working of the Western democracies.

> I have seen your Parliament, your Senate, your vote, majority, ballot; it is the same thing everywhere, my friend. The powerful men in every country

are moving society whatever way they like, and the rest are only like a flock of sheep.[43]

All those things that you hear about — constitutional government, freedom, liberty, and parliaments — are but jokes.[44]

If you ever saw, my friend, that shocking sight behind the scene of acting of these politicians — that revelry of bribery, that robbery in broad daylight, that dance of the Devil in man, which are practised on such occasions — you would be hopeless about man.[45]

Today we find the same shocking scenes in India, which have copied the Western form of democracy in toto, when the degradation of the politicians seems to have reached the bottom level. Thus it is clear that the Western type of democracy is not the solution to the human problem.

Socialism: The Western Type

To some, socialism is the panacea for all evils. Swami Vivekananda was an ardent champion of socialism as is apparent from his following clarion call:

Upper classes of India…you merge yourselves in the void and disappear, and let New India arise in your place. Let her arise — out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper.[46]

Thus he was a great champion of the rule by the toiling masses. He was aware of the shortcomings of the Western brand of socialism which was at that time about to come. He declared, 'I am a Socialist not because it is a perfect system, but half-a-loaf is better than no bread.'[47]

The Champion of Individual Liberty

Western socialism as it worked in different countries was based on totalitarianism and dictatorship. But Vivekananda was an ardent champion of individual liberty, as is evident from the following statement: 'It is more blessed, in my opinion, even to go wrong impelled by one's free will and intelligence than to be good as an automaton.'[47] He was, therefore, dead set against the tyranny of society over the life of the individual.

D. Burns in his *Political Ideals* observed, if we could imagine an ideal society at once individualistic and socialistic, such would be the effective ideal for most thinking men, the individualist is right in aiming at the variety of individuals and so is the socialist in emphasizing their common interest.[48] And he was right in emphasizing that 'without distinct individuals with fully free and various developments, the whole decays.'

Thus, a happy blend of individualism and socialism is to be found in Vivekananda's concept of the Vedantic society. 'Individuality in universality', he says, 'is the plan of creation'. 'Man is individual and universal.' Therefore, no totalitarianism or dictatorship. His vision of the future society is socialistic, with the toiling masses at the helm of affairs, but the form of government is democratic with maximum individual liberty. In his opinion, 'To advance oneself towards freedom — physical, mental and spiritual — is the supreme prize of man.'[49] After all, the goal of socialism is the total emancipation of each individual from every kind of fetter. According to John Elster, even 'Marx apparently believed that communism would be characterized by the full and free self-realization of the individual.'[50]

Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Nationalism

Vivekananda was an ardent champion of Nationalism also. His call for national unity was also an assertion of the national ideas: 'Forget not that thy ideal of thy womanhood is Sita, Savitri, Damayanti; forget not that the God thou worshippest is the great Ascetic of ascetics, the all-renouncing Shankara....'[51] But Vivekananda's concept of Nationalism merges ultimately into universalism. As a Vedantist it was natural for him to look upon every nation as a manifestation of the universal soul. Hence, each nation was sacred to him and the contribution of each towards the enrichment of the total human civilization was invaluable. As stated by Roman Rolland:

> He had hopes of democratic America, he was enthusiastic about Italy's culture and liberty — the great mother of Mazzini. He spoke of China as the treasury of the world. He fraternized with the martyred Baptists of Persia. He embraced in equal love the India of the Hindus, Mohammedans and the Buddhists.[52]

His nationalistic call was also socialistic since in part it ran as follows: 'Forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper, are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers.'[53] He did not believe that without the emancipation of the lower classes — the poor, the illiterate, the deprived — emancipation of India was possible, since in his opinion 'the nation lives in the cottages'. A. N. Komarov of the former Soviet Union rightly observes:

> The most important, progressive feature of the socio-political view of Vivekananda was that he envisaged the national liberation of India and the democratic social liberation of the masses as a mutually related, two-fold goal.[54]

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to point out that since the comprehensive philosophy of Vedanta formed the foundation of Vivekananda's socio-political thought, he could harmonize all incompatible ideals in the socio-political field — secularism and spirituality, socialism and individualism, nationalism and universalism — and add a new dimension to all the basic socio-political concepts — society, state, democracy, socialism, revolution, and nationalism.

It must also be emphasized that his goal is the highest that humanity has been endeavouring to attain since the very beginning, i.e. the emancipation of man from every kind of fetter — political, social, economic and spiritual. Herein lies the supreme importance of Vivekananda's socio-political thought based on Vedanta. It was a universal philosophy.

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[12] Ibid., IV:462.

[13] Ibid., 443.

[14] B.P. Pathak, 'Perestroika — The Revolution', in *Social Scientist*, March-April, 1990.

[15] *CW*, V:200.

[16] Rolland, 292.

[17] *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* [Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2nd ed.], 217. Hereafter *Letters*.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid. For a fuller discussion see *Vivekananda: The Prophet of Human Emancipation* by Santwana Das Gupta.

[20] *CW*, II:85.

[21] The present writer heard Prof. Sarkar utter these very words when she was a student at the Calcutta University attending his classes on Political Science.

[22] Rolland, 121.

[23] *CW*, Introduction, xv.

[24] Ibid., I:19.

[25] Rolland, 39.

[26] *CW*, VII:78.

[27] C. E. M. Joad, *Modern Political Theory*, 12.

[28] Ibid., 13.

[29] *Vishva-Vivek*, ed. by Sankari Prasad Basu and others, 267.

[30] *CW*, IV:463.

[31] Ibid., 470.

[32] Ibid., 464-65.

[33] Ibid., 458.

[34] *Letters*, 319.

[35] Ibid., 319-20.

[36] Ibid., 320.

[37] *CW*, III:197.

[38] Ibid., IV:435.

[39] Ibid., 441.

[40] Ibid., 442.

[41] Ibid., 461-62.

[42] Ibid., V:462.

[43] Ibid., V:461.

[44] Ibid., III:158.

[45] Ibid., V:462.

[46] Ibid., VII:326-27.

[47] *Letters*, 320.

[48] D. Burns, *Political Ideals* [Oxford University Press, 1949], 275.

[49] *Letters*, 358.

[50] John Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* [Cambridge University Press, 1985], 522.

[51] *CW*, IV:479-80.

[52] Rolland, 150 (fn).

[53] *CW*, IV:480.

[54] *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union*, trans. by Harish C. Gupta [Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture], 116.

The Educational Vision of Swami Vivekananda*

SWAMI HIRANMAYANANDA

The Defects of the Present System

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM that was introduced into India after the conquest of the country by the British was a graft of the English educational system prevailing at that time in England. The graft did not thrive well on the Indian soil because it lacked the aim and objective which had fertilized it in its native land. Macaulay wrote the Minutes which formed the basis of official educational policy of the British Government in India. He clearly stated that the Government must 'at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.' The Mudaliar Commission refers to this scheme as follows: 'The education imparted in these schools became a passport for entrance into Government services. This was mainly due to the Proclamation issued by Lord Hardinge in 1844 that for service in public offices preference should be given to those who were educated in English Schools.'

Now, an education that has such a limited objective and a purely utilitarian aim is sure to stultify itself. This is what has actually happened since English education was introduced in India in 1835. Though Commissions and

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Committees looked into the defects of the system from time to time, yet the picture has remained very nearly the same. According to the Mudaliar Commission the following are the basic shortcomings and defects of the present Secondary Schools, which are also valid for other educational institutions:

- The education given in our school is isolated from life.
- It is narrow and one-sided and fails to train the whole personality of the student.
- Education was given until recently in English, a foreign language. If a student did not fare well in English he could neither pass the School Final Examination nor find any post in Government Service. The other subjects, which were psychologically and socially important or congenial, were not given greater attention.
- The methods of teaching generally practised failed to develop in the students either independence of thought or initiative in action. It is a matter of complaint that lessons are imparted in mechanical way giving information which is reluctantly memorized by the students.
- The increase in the size of classes has considerably reduced personal contact between teachers and pupils. Thus the training of character and inculcation of proper discipline have been seriously undermined.
- The dead weight of the examination has tended to curb the teachers' initiative, to stereotype the curriculum, to promote mechanical and lifeless methods of teaching, to discourage all spirit of experimentation, and to place the stress on wrong or unimportant things in education.

Such then is the dismal picture of our educational life. All the Committees and Commissions appointed even after the achievement of independence have failed to brighten up the situation, because the reforms suggested by them have been superficial and piecemeal. What is needed now is a restatement of the aims and ideals of education, and a radical change of the approach to the problem.

In the context of these considerations we want to invoke the great personality of Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji was not merely a spiritual teacher but his vast intellect could scan all our national problems and throw on them the floodlight of his radiant mind which could resolve the darkness of ignorance underlying them. Studying the problems of Indian national life, he saw the

depth of ignorance that the people of India were steeped in. He could easily make out that the main reason for our degradation was lack of education. He wrote:

> Education, education, education alone! Travelling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people, there was brought to my mind the state of our own poor people, and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got.[1]

But Swami Vivekananda was conscious of the defects of the prevailing system of Education. Some of his views on the present education system are given below:

- It is almost wholly one of defects. Why, it is nothing but a perfect machine for turning out clerks.[2]
- We have had a negative education all along from our boyhood. We have only learnt that we are nobodies. Seldom are we given to understand that great men were ever born in our country. Nothing positive has been taught to us. We do not even know how to use our hands and feet.[3]
- Our pedagogues are making parrots of our boys and ruining their brains by cramming a lot of subjects into them...Goodness gracious! What a fuss and fury about graduating and after a few days all cooled down... It would be better if the people got a little technical education so that they might find work and earn their bread instead of dawdling about and crying for service.[4]
- ...Is that education, as a result of which the will, being continuously choked by force through generations is well-nigh killed out; is that education under whose sway even the old ideas, let alone the new ones, are disappearing one by one — is that education which is slowly making man a machine?[5]
- Well, you consider a man as educated if only he can pass some examinations and deliver good lectures. The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion — is it worth the name?[6]

If we study the above carefully we will be impressed by the fact that even as long ago as the last decade of the nineteenth century, when people were enamoured of the prevalent system of education, Swamiji could easily detect its underlying defects, and that his observations are in close accord with those made by the Mudaliar Commission at a much later date. Though Swamiji was never mainly concerned with pedagogy as such, education as a national problem always engaged his thought. His observations on education are so revealing that Sister Nivedita in one place remarks:

> With regard to the details of his educational suggestions, their pedagogic soundness had always been startling to me.[7]

But one will not be very much startled if one remembers the fact that Swamiji at the end of his spiritual quest had found the key to life. This had made him a spiritual teacher of the whole humanity. No door of human life remained closed or barred to him. He was the *yugācārya*, the teacher of the new era. So he could not only find out the defects of the educational system in vogue but clearly enunciate and formulate a new system — a system which might solve the educational problems of India and of the whole world.

The Philosophical Foundation

Aldous Huxley has said:

> Men live in accordance with their philosophy of life, their conception of the world. This is true even of the most thoughtless. It is impossible to live without a metaphysics. The choice that is given us is not between some kind of metaphysics and no metaphysics; it is always between good metaphysic and a bad metaphysics.[8]

Hence as education is the art of preparing for life, it cannot be divorced from the philosophy of life. As Professor Dewey puts it,

> If we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions, intellectual and emotional, toward nature and fellowmen, philosophy may be defined as the general theory of education or education in its more general term or generalized theory of education.[9]

If we read the history of educational movement in Europe from the eighteenth century, we shall find that the educational theories of Rousseau, Kant, Herbert Spencer and Froebel are based on the particular brand of philosophy they adhered to. For instance, Rousseau wrote:

> Whatever comes from the hand of the author of nature is good and everything gets defiled in contact with man.[10]

For Rousseau the state of nature is the ideal state, and so in education he disapproved interference with nature and advocated individualism. Hegel in his philosophy of absolute idealism held that everyone existed for the State. So, according to him the State has the absolute right to determine who should be taught, how they should be taught and what they should be taught. When we take up the education system of Granville Stanley Hall and John Dewey, we find that

> The starting point of their educational thought is the doctrine of evolution as applied in child-study, and the philosophy of both men is, broadly speaking, pragmatic in its insistence on the subordination of intellect to practical end.[11]

But Western philosophy, as it is not based on the experiential verifiability of its doctrines, has always been unequal to the task of solving life's problems. In contrast, Indian philosophy has always been rooted in the direct experience or realization of the verities that it propounds. A philosophical truth incapable of verification through *anubhūti* (experience) has always been held to be inconsequential and inane. That is why Western philosophy and educational theories based on them are never related to life. They are subservient to political, social and economic values and conditions. Western education wavers between the individualism of democratic countries and the absolutistic indoctrination of the socialistic bloc. So thinkers like Aldous Huxley say:

> The time has now come when we must ask in what precisely a good education consist.[12]

Regarding this Swami Vivekananda says, 'The use of higher education is to find out how to solve the problems of life,' and he goes on to add, 'and this is what is engaging the profound thought of the modern civilized world, but it

was solved in our country thousands of years ago.'[13] It could be solved because in India that fundamental philosophical truth, which solves all problems of life, had been realized in life.

Before we undertake any discussion of this philosophy we shall do well to understand the formative influence that went to the determining of Swami Vivekananda's vision. Regarding this Sister Nivedita says:

> There can be no doubt, I think, that the formative influences in his life were three fold: First, his education in English and Sanskrit literature; secondly, the great personality of his Guru, illustrating and authenticating that life which formed the theme of all the sacred writings; and thirdly, as I would maintain, his personal knowledge of India and the Indian peoples, as an immense religious organism, of which his Master himself, with all his greatness, had been only, as it were, the personification and utterance.[14]

To these I shall add a fourth: his own spiritual experiences culminating in the *nirvikalpa* samādhi at Cossipore. Of course, in the life of his Master, which was an epitome of the Indian achievements in philosophy and religion, Swami Vivekananda found the key to life. Because 'here was one to whom samādhi was a constant mode of knowledge. Every hour saw the swing of the mind from the many to the one. Every moment heard the utterance of wisdom gathered superconsciously.'[15] By studying this life and following it Swami Vivekananda could not only attain knowledge but also learn about the method to acquire it. By following this method, he found that 'he who was thus the living embodiment of books was so unconsciously for he had read none of them.'[16]

But more about it later. Now, what was the knowledge that was revealed to Sri Ramakrishna in samādhi? Swami Vivekananda says on this subject as follows:

- It was given to me to live with a man who was as ardent a dualist, as ardent an Advaitist, as ardent a Bhakta as a Jnani. And living with this man first put it into my head to understand the Upaniṣads and the texts of the scriptures from an independent and better basis than by blindly following the commentators; and in my opinion and in my researches, I came to the conclusion that these texts are not at all contradictory... But the one fact I found is that in all the Upaniṣads they begin with dualistic

ideas, with worship and all that, and end with a grand flourish of Advaitic ideas.[17]

- Therefore, I now find, in the light of this man's life, that the dualist and the Advaitist need not fight each other. Each has a place, and a great place in national life. The dualist must remain, for he is as much a part and parcel of the national religious life as the Advaitist. One cannot exist without the other; one is the fulfilment of the other.[18]
- We have seen how in the whole of this universe there is but One Existence; and that One Existence when seen through the senses is called the world, the world of matter... There is but one Being which the ignorant call the world. When a man goes higher in knowledge, he calls the very same Being the world of thought. Again when knowledge itself comes, all illusions vanish, and man finds it is nothing but Atman. I am that One Existence. This is the last conclusion.[19]

In the light of the above discussion it is apparent that Swami Vivekananda held that Advaita realization was the acme of man's quest for spiritual life, though he did not deny the validity of other realizations. As he says:

> Man is not travelling from error to truth but climbing up from truth to truth, from truth that is lower to truth that is higher.[20]

Or in the language of Sister Nivedita:

> It must never be forgotten that it was Swami Vivekananda who, while proclaiming the sovereignty of the Advaita Philosophy, as including that experience in which all is one, without a second, also added to Hinduism the doctrine that Dvaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita are but three phases or stages in a single development of which the last-named constitutes the goal. This is part and parcel of the still greater and more simple doctrine that many and the One are the same Reality, perceived by the mind at different times and in different attitudes.'[21]

This Advaita Vedanta, till the advent of Swami Vivekananda, had been thought to be meant for only a few. It was like the eternal snow on the pinnacle of personal realization of a few to be gazed at from afar and admired. It never thawed and melted into a flowing stream irrigating and drenching the parched

soil of social life. It was Swami Vivekananda's contribution to Indian spiritual life to bridge the hiatus between individual achievement and social need. Says he:

> We must prove the truth of pure Advaitism in practical life. Shankara left this Advaita philosophy in the hills and forests, while I have come to bring it out of those places and scatter it broadcast before the work-a-day world and society. The lion-roar of Advaita must resound in every hearth and home, in meadows and groves, over hills and plains.'[22]

And what distinctive merit will this philosophy have on individuals and society? Swami Vivekananda says:

> What a mine of strength is in this Impersonal God, when all superstitions have been thrown overboard and man stands on his feet with the knowledge — I am the Impersonal Being of the world! What can make me afraid? I care not even for nature's laws. Death is a joke to me. Man stands on the glory of his own soul, the infinite, the eternal, the deathless — that soul which no instruments can pierce, which no air can dry, nor fire burn, no water melt, the infinite, the birthless, the deathless, without beginning and without end, before whose magnitude the suns and moons and all their systems appear like drops in the ocean, before whose glory space melts away into nothingness, and time vanishes into non-existence. This glorious soul we must believe in. Out of that will come power. Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves strong, strong you will be; if you think yourselves impure, impure you will be; if you think yourselves pure, pure you will be. This teaches us not to think ourselves as weak, but as strong, omnipotent, omniscient. No matter that I have not expressed it yet, it is in me. All knowledge is in me, all power, all purity, and all freedom. Why cannot I express this knowledge? Because I do not believe in it. Let me believe in it and it must and will come out. This is what the idea of the Impersonal teaches.[23]

So, this is the grand idea which forms the bed-rock of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of life. This is the charter of enfranchisement which he has drawn up not only for the Hindus alone but for the whole world. To realize the unity

of the whole universe in our empirical and transcendental experience is the aim and end of Swami Vivekananda's outlook of life. As a natural corollary from this philosophical standpoint follows what has been stated by Sister Nivedita:

> This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of *karma*, not as divorced from, but as expressing *jñāna* and *bhakti*. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard and the field, are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk, or the door of the temple. To him there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality. All his words, from one point of view, read as commentary upon this central conviction. 'Art, Science and Religion,' he said once, 'are but three different ways of expressing a single truth. But in order to understand this we must have the theory of Advaita.'[24]

What is the pedagogic significance of this philosophy? In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

> The only *ism* that we require now is this wonderful idea of the soul — its eternal might, its eternal strength, its eternal purity, and its eternal perfection. If I had a child I would from its very birth begin to tell it 'Thou art the Pure One.' You have read in one of the Puranas that beautiful story of queen Madalasa, how as soon as she has a child she puts her baby with her own hands in the cradle and how as the cradle rocks to and fro, she begins to sing: 'Thou art the Pure One, the Stainless, the Sinless, the Mighty One, the Great One.' Ay, there is much in that. Feel that you are great and you become great.[25]

In another place:

> Make your children strong from their very childhood, teach them not weakness, nor forms but make them strong; let them stand on their feet — bold, all conquering, all-suffering; and first of all, let them learn the glory of the soul.[26]

So, this is the philosophical foundation on which Swami Vivekananda wanted to build up the grand edifice of his educational system which would

prepare men and women of the whole world to achieve the summum bonum of human life and existence.

The Psychological Background

Bertrand Russell in his book on *Education and Civilization* says that any serious educational theory must consist of two parts — a conception of the ends of life and a science of psychological dynamics, that is, of the laws of mental change: the science of psychology is to consider what can be done towards realizing the purposes or aims of education. The old traditional method did not take cognizance of the mind of the child, the psychological processes involved in learning. They were mainly concerned with what the children should do, how they should work, and so on. It was Rousseau who first drew our attention to the difference in aptitude of children. Gradually we have awakened to the fact that the 'being to be educated' must be studied first. In this sense education has been psychologized.

But the difficulty has been that there are many schools of European psychology each differing from the other. There is no unanimity, and naturally it is well-nigh impossible to arrive at any truth in the midst of this medley of thought. Dr. Ballard has rightly remarked:

> The votaries of the general science of psychology I have split up into warring schools or sects. Each maintains that it is the custodian of the true faith, while all the other sects have gone astray like lost sheep. The behaviourist will have no traffic with the introspectionists, the Gestalt psychologists none with the psychoanalysts. They quarrel about everything, even about the very elements of which the object of study is composed, some maintaining that they are static things, like the atoms of chemistry, others that they are active and dynamic things — events rather than entities, processes rather than products. In fact, we are no longer faced with psychology but with psychologies, no longer with a pure science but with a medley of contradictory assertions and denials. No wonder the teacher elects to leave the matter alone.[27]

A similar view has been expressed by D. J. Moxley in the *Encyclopaedia of Modern Knowledge*: 'Psychology is still a young science and that its theories

are yet tentative and provisional. In other words the Newton of psychology has not yet appeared though Freud or Jung or Adler may perhaps be its Galileo.' Now it will be quite apparent that to build an educational system upon theories which are tentative and provisional will mean that the system also will be tentative and provisional.

Nay more. These educational systems, based as they are on incorrect psychologies, prescribe play and play-way, etc. as the method of teaching. These paths of least resistance fail to train the will and personality of the educant. Aldous Huxley rightly remarks:

> Psychology has its Gresham's law, its bad money drives out the good. Most people tend to perform the actions that require least effort, to think the thoughts that are the easiest, to feel the emotions that are most vulgarly commonplace, to give rein to the desires that are most nearly animal. And they will tend to do this even if they possess the knowledge and skill to do otherwise. Along with the necessary knowledge and skill must be given the will to use them, even under the pressure of incessant temptation to take the line of least resistance and become an addict to psychological drugs. Mostly, people will not wish to resist these temptations unless they have a coherent philosophy of life, which makes it reasonable and right for them to do so, and unless they know some technique by means of which they can be sure of giving practical effect to their good intentions.[28]

If we read the above statement carefully we will find that Western psychology is not an infallible guide for the training of the mind which is what education means. As Swami Vivekananda says: 'The idea of psychology in the West is very much degraded.'[29] The study of psychology in the West does not help us to control our mind. We cannot free ourselves from the tentacles of our senses. Swami Vivekananda points out:

> We are slaves to ourselves and to others. Deep down in our subconscious mind are stored up all the thoughts and acts of the past, not only of this life, but of all other lives we have lived. This great boundless ocean of subjective mind is full of all the thoughts and actions of the past. Each one of us is striving to be recognized, pushing outward for expression, surging wave after wave, out upon the objective mind, the conscious mind. These thoughts,

> the stored-up energy, we take for natural desires, talents, etc. It is because we do not realize their true origin, we obey them blindly, unquestioningly; and slavery, the most helpless kind of slavery, is the result, and we call ourselves free. Free! We who cannot for a moment govern our own minds, nay, cannot hold our mind on a subject, focus it on a point to the exclusion of everything else for a moment! Yet we call ourselves free.[30]

But Indian psychology, says Swamiji,

> teaches us to hold in check the wild gyrations of the mind, place it under the control of the will, and thus free ourselves from its tyrannous mandates. Psychology is therefore that science of sciences, without which all sciences and all other knowledge are worthless.[31]

Swami Vivekananda's approach to Psychology was based on the systems of Sankhya, Yoga, and Vedanta. But on these he focused the searchlight of his mastermind and reinterpreted the theories in terms of modern science. It is astonishing that at a time when Freud had hardly formulated his theory of the unconscious, Swamiji had clearly and unmistakably spoken not only about the conscious or the subconscious but the super-conscious also. Swami Vivekananda says: 'Consciousness is a mere film between two oceans, the subconscious and the super-conscious.'[32] In another place he remarks: 'What does consciousness matter! Why, it is nothing as compared with the unfathomable depths of the subconscious and the heights of the super-conscious!'[33]

Freud at a later date spoke of the unconscious as constituting the greater portion of the mind. But Freud had no idea of the super-conscious and, for the matter of that, in Western psychology there is no conception of the super-conscious. Only recently have the parapsychologists headed by Dr. Rhine and others have come to admit the existence of extra-sensory perception (E.S.P.).[34] But the beginning is very rudimentary and crude. Moreover Freudian way of curing mental ills through the Free Association Method gives at best only temporary relief. The complexes are resolved only to recur over and over again because the mind is not brought under control.

It is the same case with other psychological systems of the West. But it is different with Indian psychology. There is a method to bring the mind under control. Swami Vivekananda says:

> Practical psychology directs first of all its energies in controlling the unconscious, and we know that we can do it. Why? Because we know the cause of the unconscious is the conscious; the unconscious thoughts are the submerged millions of our old conscious thoughts, old conscious actions become petrified — we do not look at them, do not know them, have forgotten them. But mind you, if the power of evil is in the unconscious, so also is the power of good. We have many things stored in us as in pocket. We have forgotten them, do not even think of them and there are many of them, rotting, becoming positively dangerous; they come forth, the unconscious causes which kill humanity. True psychology would, therefore, try to bring them under the control of the conscious. The great task is to revive the whole man, as it were, in order to make him the complete master of himself. Even what we call the automatic action of the organs within our bodies, such as liver etc. can be made to obey our commands.
>
> This is the first part of the study, the control of the unconscious. The next is to go beyond the conscious. Just as unconscious work is beneath consciousness, so there is another work which is above consciousness. When this super-conscious state is reached, man becomes free and divine, death becomes immortality, weakness becomes infinite power, and iron bondage becomes liberty. That is the goal, the infinite realm of the super-conscious.[35]

So, when it was pointed out above, in the case of Sri Ramakrishna, 'Here was one to whom samādhi was a constant mode of knowledge. Every moment heard the utterance of wisdom gathered super-consciously,' we were referring to a psychological method which has been practised in India from time immemorial for gaining knowledge, secular and spiritual.

And in order to attain this super-conscious state the first and foremost thing necessary is concentration and detachment from the object of the senses. That is why Swamiji says:

> To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. If I had to do my education over again, and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I would collect facts at will. Side by side, in the child, should be developed the power of concentration and detachment.[36]

So, we find in the language of Sister Nivedita:

> Fortunately for the civilization of India, the Hindu has always clearly perceived the mind behind the method as the thing with which education has fundamentally to deal.[37]

There is another way of looking at mind. Swamiji analyses mind into four aspects. He says:

> The internal organ or mind has four aspects. First — *manas*, the cogitating or thinking faculty, which is usually almost entirely wasted, because uncontrolled; properly governed it is a wonderful power. Second — *buddhi*, the will (sometimes called the intellect). Third — *ahamkāra*, the self-conscious egotism (from *aham*). Fourth — *chitta*, the substance in and through which all the faculties act, the floor of the mind as it were; or the sea in which various faculties are waves.[38]

In accordance with the predominance of the working of these different aspects we classify men into four general types. 'There are four general types of men — the rational, the emotional, the mystical, and the worker.'[39] So, in the education of these different types of men different methods are to be followed. Swamiji says:

> The teaching must therefore be modified according to the needs of the taught... Past lives have moulded our tendencies; give to the taught in accordance with his tendency. Intellectual, mystical, devotional, practical — make one the basis, but teach the others with it. Intellect must be balanced with love, the mystical nature with reason, while practice must form part of every method. Take every one where he stands and push him forward.[40]

Through the harmonized working of different aspects of mind a well-integrated personality will eventually develop.

The Aim of Education

From the above discussion on the philosophical and psychological basis of education we find that, according to Swami Vivekananda, education is the training of the mind with a definite objective: the development of the total personality of a man. Swamiji says:

> The ideal of all education, all training, should be this man-making.[41] Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library.[42]

In another place he says: 'The end of all education, all training should be man-making... The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow.'[43] And yet in another place, 'It is man-making education all round that we want.'[44]

The Method

Having thus determined the aim of education, let us examine the method which Swamiji prescribes for realizing this ideal. It has already been said that the philosophical basis of Swamiji's view of life is Advaita — the unity of all existence. To realize this unity is the aim and end of all our quest. According to this view, there is no question of acquiring anything extraneous. Swamiji says:

> Now this knowledge, again, is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. What we say a man 'knows', should, in strict psychological language, be what he 'discovers', or 'unveils'; what a man 'learns' is really what he 'discovers', by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge.[45]

And the natural deduction from this is:

> ...you see no one can teach anybody. The teacher spoils everything by thinking that he is teaching. Thus the Vedanta says that within man is all knowledge — even in a boy it is so - and it requires only an awakening, and that much is the work of a teacher.[46] You cannot teach a child any more than you can grow a plant. All you can do is on the negative side — you can only help.[47] You can take away the obstacles, but knowledge comes out of its own nature. Loosen the soil a little so that it may come out easily. Put a hedge round it; see that it is not killed by anything, and there your work stops. You cannot do anything else. The rest is a manifestation from within its own nature. So, with the education of a child ; a child educates itself.[48]

That is why Swami Vivekananda succinctly defines education as 'the manifestation of perfection already in man.'[49] So, according to Swamiji 'Liberty is the first condition of growth.'[50] A child should be allowed to develop in its own particular way. The only help that can be given is to help it to perfect the instrument with which it will gather knowledge. A man is a body-mind complex. Hence the body cannot and should not be neglected. Physical weakness is a great hindrance in our life. Swamiji says:

> We speak of many things parrot-like, but never do them; speaking and not doing has become a habit with us. What is the cause of that? Physical weakness. This sort of weak brain is not able to do anything; we must strengthen it. First of all our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita. These are bold words; but I have to say them, for I love you. I know where the shoe pinches. I have gained a little experience. You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger.[51]

In another place he says:

> What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and secrets of the universe and will accomplish their purpose even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face.[52]

But the first requisite for bringing about a physical, mental and spiritual regeneration of the people is *śraddhā*. Swamiji says:

> Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith in God — this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again brought into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need... We have lost faith in ourselves. Therefore, to preach the Advaita aspect of the Vedanta is necessary to rouse up the hearts of men, to show them the glory of their souls.[53]

It has been said in the *Gita*: *śraddhāvān labhate jñānam*, and Swamiji also exhorts people to have this *śraddhā* for the attainment of knowledge. Along with perfecting the body by acquiring 'muscles of iron and nerves of steel', we should try to perfect the other instrument necessary for acquiring knowledge, the mind. And the only method for perfecting this instrument is concentration. Swamiji says:

> There is only one method by which to attain this knowledge, that which is called concentration. The chemist in his laboratory concentrates all the energies of his mind into one focus, and throws them upon the materials he is analysing, and so he finds out their secrets. The astronomer concentrates all the energies of his mind and projects them through his telescope upon the skies; and the stars, the sun, and the moon give up their secrets to him. The more I concentrate my thoughts on the matter on which I am talking to you, the more light I can throw upon you. You are listening to me, and the more you concentrate your thoughts, the more clearly you will grasp what I have to say.
>
> How has all the knowledge in the world been gained but by the concentration of the powers of the mind? The world is ready to give up the secrets if we only know how to knock, how to give it the necessary blow. The strength and force of the blow come through concentration. There is no limit to the power of the human mind. The more concentrated it is, the more power is brought to bear on one point; that is the secret.[54]

But the question arises: can this concentration be developed? Swamiji says, 'The Yogis say, yes. The Yogis say that we can get perfect control of the mind.'[55] But along with this power of concentration another thing is equally important — the power of detachment. Swami Vivekananda says:

> So along with the development of concentration we must develop the power of detachment. We must learn not only to attach the mind to one thing exclusively but also to detach it at a moment's notice and place it upon something else. These two should be developed together to make it safe.[56]

Sister Nivedita very penetratingly puts Swamiji's views in perspective when she writes:

> The training of the attention — rather than the learning of any special subject or the development of any particular faculty — has always been, as Swami Vivekananda claimed for it, the chosen goal of Hindu education. Great men have been only as incidents in the tale of this national effort to achieve control and self-direction of the mind itself.'[57]

Concentration as a method for acquiring knowledge is a contribution of the Indian mind to education methodology. Western pedagogy has been groping in the dark, and till now they have not been able to find out a method of education which is stable and helpful. So Indian educationists, instead of following the Western method, should turn their attention to their age-old method which has withstood the test of time. As sister Nivedita says:

> It is not here then, in the object and nature or the inner psychological process, that Western educators have anything to teach India.[58]

On the other hand, it is the Western educationists who will have to sit at the feet of India to learn the true educational method.

Now, how to achieve concentration? Mind can be controlled and concentration attained by following the methods of *rāja-yoga*. *Rāja-yoga* prescribes several methods but the most important of them are breathing and meditation. Swamiji says:

> By the exercise of breathing we begin to feel all the movements of the body that we (now) do not feel. As soon as we begin to feel them, we begin to master them. Thoughts in germ will open to us and we will be able to get hold of them.[59]

About meditation Swamiji remarks as follows:

> Before we can control the mind we must study it. We have to seize this unstable mind and drag it from its wanderings and fix it on one idea, over and over again this must be done. By power of will we must get hold of the mind and make it stop and reflect upon the glory of God.[60]

So this in brief is the process by which mind can be developed into a fit instrument for gaining knowledge. But as a prerequisite another thing is necessary: brahmacharya. As Swamiji says in his various lectures:

> Every boy should be trained to practise absolute brahmacharya and then and then alone, faith and *śraddhā* will come.[61] Chastity in thought, word and deed always and in all conditions is what is called brahmacharya.[62] Do you see, simply by the observance of strict brahmacharya all learning can be mastered in a very short time — one has an unfailing memory of what one hears or knows but once. It is owing to this want of continence that everything is on the brink of ruin in our country.[63] The chaste brain has tremendous energy and gigantic will-power.[64] Controlled desire leads to the highest results. Transform the sexual energy into the spiritual energy. The stronger the force is, the more can be done with it. Only a powerful current of water can do hydraulic mining.[65]

But in order to receive this training one should live in constant touch with competent teachers. Ordinary schools where mercenary teachers give merely academic education to students is no education at all. So Swamiji says:

> My idea of education is personal contact with the teacher — *guru-griha-vāsa*.[66] One should live from his very boyhood with one whose character is like a blazing fire and should have before him a living example of the highest teaching... In our country the imparting of knowledge has always been through men of renunciation. India had all good prospects so long as *tyāgis* (men of renunciation) used to impart knowledge.[67]

Again he says:

> The disciple of old used to repair to the hermitage of the Guru, fuel in hand; and the Guru, after ascertaining his competence, would teach him the Vedas...[68] Without faith, humility, submission, and veneration in our hearts towards our religious teacher, there cannot be any growth of religion in us; and it is a significant fact that, where this kind of relation between the teacher and the taught prevails, there alone gigantic spiritual men are growing; while in those countries which have neglected to keep up this kind of relation the religious teacher has become a mere lecturer, the teacher expecting his five dollars and the person taught expecting his brain to be filled with the teacher's words, and each going his own way after this much has been done.[69]

A life can be lighted only by the fire of another life. So, unless the teacher is a man of character and the student is receptive, there can be no education in the real sense of the term. The man-making education which Swamiji wants can be imparted only when a student lives with an ideal teacher and profits by his example and advice in the different situations of day-to-day life.

Swamiji also wanted that the school should have proper environmental set-up. That is why he says 'that true education is gained by constant living in communion with nature.'[70]

The above are in brief outline the theories of objectives and methods of education as adumbrated by Swami Vivekananda. They are revolutionary in character, and at the same time they are rooted in the age-old tradition of India. Education in modern India has been wrongly planned and carelessly executed. It is high time we discard the prevailing systems. We should develop our own system on national lines as indicated by Swamiji. We can revise our educational plan and programme; then and then alone shall we be able to evolve a system which will be truly 'man-making and character-building'. And this is necessary not only for the regeneration of India but for the redemption of the whole world. As Swamiji says:

> But education has yet to be in the world, and civilisation — civilisation has begun nowhere yet.[71]
>
> The ideal, therefore, is that we must have the whole education in our country, spiritual and secular, in our hands, and it must be on national lines, through national methods as far as practicable.[72]

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Swami Vivekananda's Message to the West

DOROTHY MADISON

In a sense it can be said that Swami Vivekananda embodied in his own personality the message he gave to the West. It may even be said — although one hesitates to second-guess divine intentions — that Swami Vivekananda was Sri Ramakrishna's personal message to the West. So let us inquire into those areas beyond the law, where the elaborate dramas of appearance and reality are fabricated. First, we must know what the message was that Swamiji gave. Second, what were the conditions in the West that shaped his message? Third, in what ways did Swamiji's personality provide the answers to the needs and problems of Western culture and society?

In essence, Swami Vivekananda said to the people of the West: 'Get up! Wake up! Shake off the dream of body and mind. Within your being shines the infinite Self. Know this Self, realize it, become one with it. Claim your true identity — you are that Self. Then, free from fear and delusion, live your life in the consciousness of eternal being, knowledge, and bliss.'

Having laid down the basics, Swamiji supplied the details, telling the people of the West to love, serve, and care for others in an attitude of divine worship. He said that if you treat everybody as the living God, as embodied divinity itself, then your work, your duties in life, your burdens, your goals and all such matters can no longer bind and tie you down. The death grip of self-interest will loose its hold on your life and mind. Free to breathe, you can then work like an angel in total liberating non-attachment. Such work, stripped of self-love, purifies the mind, deepens devotion, expands consciousness, siphons off delusion, and sets the stage for Self-knowledge.

Now, in his efforts to awaken the divinity in every human being, Swamiji made the tenets of monistic Vedanta public property. It was inevitable that he chose monistic Vedanta as the vehicle of his message, for his own experience verified its truths. But more than that, Vedanta is universal. It is not bound to any period of history or confined within any culture. It is, rather, the demonstrable basis of all religious belief, not only because it is free from the strictures of theology but also because its dialectic, based upon spiritual knowledge, solves the problems of metaphysics simply and convincingly.

This message Swamiji gave to a 'new-world' nation of vigorous people, the freedom-loving Americans. Although these democrats won his heart with their warmth, independence, enterprise, and generosity of spirit, he had misgivings about the direction in which they were heading. He saw that in their pursuit of happiness, the entire nation seemed to be going overboard for wealth and the enjoyment of pleasure.

Worse, even America's common man, who was stubbornly refusing to be ground under foot by the 'old-world' brutalities of class and capital, was being menaced by this dollar worship. But — and this factor is all-important — the prophet in Swamiji knew that the coming centuries belonged to the common man, and that, as in the past, it was society's common men who would build humanity's future. And it was for these common people, not only in America or India but the whole world over, that Swamiji thought and felt, loving them with a vast paternal passion.

No wonder, therefore, that Swamiji could neither neglect nor ignore anything that touched the life of man. Health, education, politics, economics, culture, what to speak of religion — everything truly that pertains to man became the object of his careful thought. Not unlike the social theories of the nineteenth century — the Utopian socialists, Marxian socialists, and the Fabians — he envisioned the labouring class as the coming wielders of power, guardians of culture, and stewards of prosperity. As such, he saw them following their own bents, practising their skills, and cultivating their talents freely without hindrance.

At the same time Swamiji was acutely aware that, just as Christ said, man does not live by bread alone. Further, he knew that human beings may possess all the material comforts, yet turn into beasts. Consequently, to neutralize wealth's side-effects such as greed, rapacity, extortion, and plunder, he

introduced a new element into the elevation of the common man. This was of course the spiritual truth about man, the nature of spiritual liberation, and the like.

As Swamiji saw it, a society saturated in the consciousness of man's divinity would achieve a powerful synthesis of all the areas, values, and goals of human life. Where both the people being served and the people who do the serving regard each other and themselves as the same Self, as embodied divinity, all equal without exception, there would be little chance for any of the harmful side-effects that ensue from uncommitted prosperity.

As to who would be serving whom, it was Swamiji's idea that the higher classes would work to raise the lower. That is, society's top people — the learned, the socially, culturally, and spiritually prominent men and women, who rarely earned their bread by the sweat of their brow — would help the common man to rise up. Swamiji wanted the fortunate to serve the less fortunate, always with the idea that they were actually worshipping God. Out of such service, a powerful spiritual dynamism would transform the rise of the common man from a labour movement centred on secular issues to a pan-human movement centred on the divinity of man and the quest for Self-knowledge. Now all of these — and many other — notions about Swamiji's message to the West have been aired and debated in the decades since his death. Naturally the question arises whether his message has been received and acted upon, and if so, with what effect. Alas, who can possibly answer this? The difficulty is that during these hundred-odd years, called by some 'the century of total war', wrenching shifts and upheavals have overtaken the world. So who can possibly tell? Who is there who wants to say: 'No, absolutely not. There is not a single sign that the West has paid the slightest attention to the Swamiji's message.' On the other hand, who dares to stand up and say: 'Yes, certainly the West has heard Swamiji's message! The 1960s, with its revolutions of youth, women, race, sex, civil rights, drugs, and altered states of consciousness, shattered once and for all the West's resistance to matters of mind, soul, and religious experience.' One might even venture to say that Swamiji's ideas have begun, like rising ground water, to moisten the West's drought-stricken roots. Indeed, without ever naming him, the movers and shakers of the New Age subculture are floating Swamiji's ideas and concepts for all they are worth. Already many of his ideas have entered into the American folk culture.

Whatever the merit of the old views, the time has come to try a new tack, to explore our thesis that Swami Vivekananda's message to the West was fully embodied in his own personality and behaviour. Such a view implies, of course, that Swamiji reflected and manifested in ideal fullness the spirit, nature, and traits of the new age. Happily, these characteristics are not hard to discern either in Swamiji's make-up or in the new human epoch now under way.

The most definitive trait of the new age is universality. Belief systems, doctrines, habits, and attitudes, formed in the ancient past, mingle and mesh with the latest postulates of scientific thought, shaping the conduct of human life. Further, formerly isolated cultures have been shoved together in both amicable and hostile relationships. The modern age also teems with energy, wealth, intellectual exuberance, and a violence symptomatic of great change. Its keynote and glory is humanity itself. In no other age have men and women possessed such faith in their own powers, or been so concentrated upon their own nature, needs, growth, and well-being. Further, the power of plain people is everywhere in evidence, and the common man is becoming sovereign for the first time in his long, unhappy history.

Now, as if precipitated out of the centre of this vortex, Swamiji's presence brought into being a new order of human being, larger, more rounded out, more complex, more powerfully rooted in the changeless real. The current of his thought, impelled by love and spiritual power, showed the interaction of humanity's many trends, traditions, and tendencies. He was, so to speak, at one with humanity whom he held dearer than life. He was, after all, a sage, a primordial rishi, said by his Master, to embody the whole of humanity. As such, he was pitched headlong into the service of others.

Be that as it may, Swamiji manifested in full the four major traditions of Western culture: reason, belief, humanism, and science. As with the ancient Greeks, who regarded reason as man's prime faculty, Swamiji did not hesitate to impose on all entities and concepts the test of pure reason. Once he burst out, 'Is it not tremendously blasphemous to believe against reason? What right have we not to use the greatest gift that God has given to us?'[1] His lectures on Vedanta philosophy prove his mastery in drawing logical conclusions. Where Swamiji differed from the Greek rationalists was in his ability to pass beyond the level of the intellect into transcendental awareness. His ability to access the Real acted in two ways: direct experience of the Real tallied with the

conclusions of rational thought; and the laws of logic lent rational support to experience of the Real. One result of this meshing of reason with the Real was that his interest was not engaged so much by speculative reason as by practical reason, the rock-bottom foundation of humanity's struggle against inertia and spiritual bondage.

Religion, the West's second great tradition, Swamiji not only embodied, but did so with flourish. This was inevitable, since he was the chosen apostle of Sri Ramakrishna, the divine founder of a new world religion. Many times has he been linked to St. Paul, Christ's apostle, who spent his life spreading the teachings of a Godman. Like Paul, Swamiji dignified the poor and oppressed by welcoming them as the inheritors of divine life. But unlike Paul, he did not equate culture with vanity or religious piety with dust and ashes. Instead, he told people to practise illumination: to see God in everything, worship and serve God in everybody, but use their brains, master their vices, and develop their virtues along with their talents. The first sign you are becoming religious, he said, is that you are becoming cheerful. This is not to say that he did not declare the highest truth to all corners:

> You are the omniscient, omnipresent being of the universe. But of such beings can there be many? Can there be a hundred thousand million omnipresent beings? Certainly not. Then what becomes of us all? You are only one; there is only one such Self, and that One Self is you.[3]

Humanism, the third great Western tradition, blazed in Swamiji like fire in a gemstone. Simply stated, humanism is the tradition in which the theme of humanity — not God, not reason — occupies the centre of the stage. As part of the Renaissance revolt against the authority of the Church, it fed on the classics of Greece and Rome and, imitating the ancients, began to explore the human world of human beings. This humanist attitude has presided over Western culture ever since. Needless to say, Swamiji's interest in the world of his fellow-beings never faded. But where the renaissance humanist down-played the importance of religion, Swamiji did not. Rather, he covered all attainments of mind, heart, and hand with God, and showed how, in the midst of diversity, people can work their way to Self-knowledge and oneness with God.

Thus, although he was a man of religion to his marrow — monk, sage, prophet, apostle — Swamiji could yet delight in knowledge for its own sake,

and hail the shifts and changes that new knowledge brought about. Like the renaissance humanists, he drew inspiration from viewing men and women as the builders of nations, upholders of society, creators of art, pursuers of truth, lovers of beauty, and explorers of far-off places. Indeed, like the fourteenth century, the last part of Swamiji's nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of a new age. At this particular time certain thinkers were looking for a prophet to lead Western society out of the barrens of industrialism, lockstep rationalism, and hypocritical, unforgiving Victorianism. One such potential prophet was the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, who said: 'God is dead! God remains dead! and we have killed him! How shall we comfort ourselves — we who are the greatest murderers of all?' But Nietzsche went mad. There was also Swami Vivekananda, not of the West, but of India, whose message still waits to be studied.

Science, the systematic knowledge of the physical universe, is the West's fourth major tradition and, like humanism, took on new life during the Renaissance. But it has been only within the past two centuries that it transformed ways of living in most of the cultures of the world. That is, many more people now populate the earth, have more food, clothing and luxuries, live crowded together in huge cities, depend on each other for necessities, and carry on uniform existences. To science the modern world bows and pays tribute, captured by its unceasing ability to conquer nature and deliver the goods.

Now Swamiji loved science, loved to immerse himself in its study, and appreciated the fact that its technology enabled the human race to master nature. Indeed, as a proponent of the no-nonsense, truth-seeking scientific method, he advocated for spiritual practice: care of the body, concentration of the mind, discrimination of the intellect, and realization of Self-knowledge. As he said:

> This tendency you will find throughout modern thought; in one word, what is meant by science is that the explanations of things are in their own nature, and that no external beings or existences are required to explain what is going on in the universe. The chemist never requires demons, or ghosts, or anything of that sort, to explain his phenomena. The physicist never requires any one of these to explain the things he knows, nor does

> any other scientist. And this is one of the features of science which I mean to apply to religion. In this religions are found wanting and that is why they are crumbling into pieces.[4]

On the other hand, Swamiji was perfectly aware of the limitations of science. At Harvard University he answered a question about Vedanta's idea of civilization:

> What is the value of all these machines and sciences? They have only one result: they spread knowledge. You have not solved the problem of want, but only made it keener. Machines do not solve the poverty question; they simply make men struggle the more. Competition gets keener. What value has nature in itself?... The only value is that it makes this development. This universe is simply a gymnasium in which the soul is taking exercise; and after these exercises we become gods. So the value of everything is to be decided by how far it is a manifestation of God. Civilization is the manifestation of the divinity in man.[5]

Plainly, Swamiji embodied the Western tradition of science, first, in its quest for knowledge and, second, in its method for testing the truth of a proposition. The fact that he did not applaud the unwise, often greed-driven applications of science, did not make him any less its partisan or champion of its truths. If anything, it demonstrates the weight and influence of the other three Western traditions that were fully at play in his personality. It goes without saying that other lesser Western themes — the democrat, the warrior, the gentleman, the orator — also animated his being. All things considered, therefore, Swamiji himself was both his own message to the West and its messenger as well.

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Ramakrishna Vedanta in the West
NEW INTERFACES AND CHALLENGES

PROF. M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

The Nineteenth Century Ethos of the Sacred

IN HIS INCISIVE STUDY of the state of oriental religions (particularly Theosophy) and the cult of the gurus in the West, Peter Washington observed:[1]

> ...towards the end of the nineteenth century it was becoming clear that an enduring public appetite existed in the West for new and exotic forms of religious belief to supplement or even replace orthodox forms of Christianity. Swedenborg has shown one possible way forward by uniting religion and science. Mesmer and the spiritualists had demonstrated another by opening doors to the spirit world.

Pointing out further facets of what Frank Kermode has called 'a neglected story of serious frauds and delusions that had no small influence on modern art and thought', Peter Washington adds that in this ethos, 'Hinduism drew doctrinal subtlety and sheer exoticism.' And, he devotes a chapter to Vedanta as exemplified by Swami Prabhavananda and his writer devotees, notably Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, commenting that Swami Prabhavananda 'managed to stay above the temptations of Hollywood, where more adeptly self-dramatising gurus were constantly in continuous demand. People were impressed by his ability to live chastely in a notoriously corrupting world.'

The New Mystical Renaissance

Obviously the role of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement has been to steer clear of all the fads gaining ground in this ethos. Neither esoteric nor messiah-based, it advocated the way of Vedanta not theorized and mystified but lived in the lives of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and the Holy Mother. By the 1960s, when the 'Eastern masters made a concerned Westward push', the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement was a quietly authoritative and authentic one.

The result is evident today in what 'analysts' are pointing to as a new spiritual renaissance, the novelty lying in the integration of spiritual rhythms in everyday living. As Peter Ochiogrosso, in his study of 'a small but representative sample of those transformative experiences' (the sampler includes Lex Hixon), says:[2] 'Somewhere between the hard edge of Christian fundamentalism and the self-satisfaction of secular humanism, each of which in its own way seems to threaten dominance of American life at times, a whole world of spiritual growth and transformation is taking place.' While Lex Hixon called this 'the General Theory of Relativity of Religions', it seems to signal for Andrew Harvey 'the new mystical renaissance that is struggling to be born against terrible odds in the rubble of our dying civilization.'[3]

Ramakrishna Vedanta on 'the Edge of one of the Megatrends'

The quiet but crucial role of Ramakrishna Vedanta in ushering this new renaissance can hardly be exaggerated. As Carl T. Jackson, the cultural historian of Oriental Religions in the USA, has declared:[4] 'One hundred years in the United States has given the Movement a visibility and degree of acceptance unequalled by any other Asian group.' Identifying the reasons he says, 'the Ramakrishna Movement's obvious commitment to present Vedanta at a high level, the swamis' strong intellectual qualifications, and an ecumenical attitude toward other religious bodies have won over most critics....' Finally, predicting the future he says: 'As a pioneer in paving the way for introduction of Asian religious perceptions in the West, the Ramakrishna Movement may be said to stand on the edge of one of the "mega trends" of modern world history.'

More or less the same view is validated by Diana L. Eck in her study of the pluralistic, inclusivist religious situation today:[5] 'Vivekananda's perception that the crying need of the West was something he called "spirituality" has been borne out in the one hundred years since the Parliament.'

Similarly, in a recent study of world religions, Peter Ochiogrosso says:[6] 'The combination of metaphysical purity and yogic practices taught by the succeeding waves of Indian gurus to come West are all more or less descendants of the Vivekananda approach and in one form or another were appropriated by the Beat culture of the 1950s, the counter-culture of the 60s and the current New Age Movement.'

The 'perception' to which both Jackson and Eck refer is, indeed, far-ranging, deeply interior and coextensive with the other prophets. A deeply moving example is evident in Henri Nouwen. This widely respected father reports:[7] 'Over the years many new pictures have appeared on my inner walls. Some show roads, some gestures of blessing, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing. Many show faces: the face of Jesus and Mary, the faces of Therese of Lisieux and Charles de Foucould, the faces of Ramakrishna and the Dalai Lama.' (For our forthcoming descriptive bibliography of writings on Ramakrishna, a random survey reveals nearly 250-300 citations during the last two years alone).

Movement versus Message/Ideology

The Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement will certainly face institutional challenges which increasing acceptance and visibility engender. The Asian groups may become larger in patronizing and may, by sheer numbers, make Vedanta centres extensions of ethnic religiosity. Islands of 'India', the 'motherland', may build themselves up with the swami as the nucleus. This, if it becomes persistent, may overshadow the interiority and inwardness of the characteristically Western responses to Ramakrishna Vedanta. Whatever one may say to the contrary, Ramakrishna Vedanta needs mediation in terms of what Andrew P. Tuck called 'isogesis'. That is, employing one's 'personal and cultural perspective' to make appropriation of the 'other' 'intelligible'. The 'act of productive understanding — isogesis — is an integral part of the interpretive process.' The Western appropriation of Ramakrishna Vedanta has to be in the logic of its own historical/cultural frames.

The challenge here is to respect the autonomy of Western interpretations and not overly 'Hinduise' Ramakrishna, however dominant Hindu paradigms and symbolic forms are in his life and message. One may have to balance what the *Paramaguru* of Post-modernism, Jacques Derrida, called 'philosophy proper' and 'exemplary philosophy', signifying respectively cultural specifics and areas which 'transcend' these cultural specifics by offering an idiom translatable across boundaries.

The Movement has to face, consequently, the legitimatizing of autonomy for the Western exponents of Ramakrishna Vedanta. The considerable growth of the Western counterpart — far flung in its centres in Europe, Far East (even Russia), the USA, UK, etc. -– necessitate that the Movement *recognize* in terms strictly of autonomy. The Great Swan's wide water can no longer be contained in the Ganga alone. New rivers are ready to receive Ramakrishna but in their own spiritually individualistic territorial waters! The Movement's greatest challenge is to consider how far to let the 'Western' Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement go its own way. Perhaps increasing insurgency may be the outcome if imaginatively conceived checks and balances are not voluntarily worked out. Institutional challenges are relatively manageable but they are linked to the more formidable ideological ones. Interfaces counterpoint challenges.

Interfaces: Bhāvamukha

'Bhāvamukha' seems to be, what Western seekers are calling, 'ordinary magic', the perception of everyday life itself as a spiritual path. What Pema Chodron says — 'self-liberate even the antidote' — seems to approximate to this. 'The ultimate perfection', she says, 'must be some sense of completely realizing that *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are one, not preferring stillness or occurrence but being able to live fully with both.' In this balancing vision, even the despised ritual dimension finds a paradigmatic place. 'When things are properly understood, one's whole life is like a ritual or ceremony. Then all the gestures of life are *mudra* and all the sounds of life are *mantra* — sacredness is everywhere.'[8]

Similarly, in his careful (though not always defensible) analysis of the implications, Timothy A. Jensen says that *bhāvamukha* is 'a crucial element in...the transforming experiences' of Ramakrishna. 'Both the literal meaning

of *bhāvamukha* and the discussions by the hagiographers point toward a resolution of the problems of identity and vocation', he says, adding that through *bhāvamukha* Ramakrishna 'could...see the possibility of living...in close contact with the world yet without clinging to it.'[9]

This is sacralizing everything not as a pious, static axiom but as a vibrant, live transfiguration of the world. The Master himself pins it down: '...I see it is He who is moving about in different forms, now as an honest man, now as a cheat and again as a villain.' 'Try to know the *nitya*', he commanded, 'through the *līlā*', and 'the Eternal is to be reached by means of the non-eternal, the Real through the help of the unreal, and the Noumenon through the help of the phenomenon.'[10]

Interpreting this in terms of Christian faith, Beatrice Bruteau (who notes that she learned the synthesis of the four *yogas* 'mainly from the swamis of the Ramakrishna Order') says: 'In the Christian vocabulary... the liberating spiritual death is not the end of the path of growth. It must be followed by resurrection, *the return to embodied life* which itself is a development state... in resurrection, *we experience unity in differentiation, we see the Absolute in every differentiated being*' (emphasis added). Citing Ramakrishna specifically Bruteau notes that 'he pointed out... the state in which to abide for ordinary daily life, ...the coming back into consciousness from the absolute unity and formlessness of samādhi. In his tradition this state is called *bhāvamukha*, and in the symbology of his spiritual life, he heard Divine Mother tell him, "Remain in *bhāvamukha*".' 'We might say', adds Bruteau, 'this means... he was told "Be true God and the true man".'[11]

Finally Hans Torwesten brings out the uniqueness of *bhāvamukha* and states: 'Many — as perhaps Teilhard de Chardin — have "dreamed" of that other state in which the whole world is transformed in a trice. Ramakrishna did not dream of it, he lived in that state everyday. It was not just poetry, not a vague pantheism — he simply saw God with eyes open, wherever he looked.'[12]

The 'New' Celibate

Abiding in ordinary life with strong spiritual bases is fraught with several challenges, the chief of which for the West (and through increasing exposure to its media, for the East, too) is love in the context of marriage. This implies

what John Welwood calls 'challenge of the heart', 'the need to be pioneers in territory that has never been fully and consciously explored. Men and women have never had to face each other with such honesty and awareness.'[13] Many are inclined to see marriage as a sacrament, and it needs, as Henri Nouwen holds, celibacy not only 'for physical, mental or spiritual reasons, but also because intimacy of marriage in itself is based on the common participation in a love greater than the love two people can offer each other.'[14]

Ramakrishna advised that after the birth of two or three children, husband and wife should live as sister and brother and 'fight' for realization 'from within the fort of samsāra'. This is a paradigm increasingly being held as inevitable for inner growth. Paradoxically, the very excesses of eroticism evident everywhere are reinforcing the vitality of celibacy within marriage. Indeed, as Adolf Guggenbuhl-Craig tersely put: 'The central issue of marriage is not well-being or happiness; it is salvation. Marriage involves not only a man and woman who happily love each other and raise offspring together, but rather two people who are trying to individuate, to find their soul's salvation.'[15]

'Goddessliness'

A related interface (with Ramakrishna Vedanta) is the figuring of the Holy Mother as an exemplar of what Diane Mariechild calls 'the lineage of feminine wisdom'. Equating 'mindfulness' itself with feminism she says that both suggest: 'pay attention, explore, and check it out for yourself.' Choosing two of her famous sayings ('I am the Mother of the virtuous… say to yourself: I have a mother', and 'If you want peace… the whole world is your own'), Mariechild regards the Holy Mother 'as a human being who has fully manifested her godliness or goddessliness.' The 'embodiment of the divine love', the Holy Mother's words 'indicate that her love is impersonal; it is given to all, regardless of their behaviour. The Holy Mother is there reaching out to every individual, whoever and wherever they are.' Consequently 'the edges will soften more easily without an attitude of criticism and fault finding.'[16]

Viewed thus, an interface is offered by Beatrice Bruteau's contention, that 'a second challenge that still seems to threaten the West is the popularity in the East of feminine images of God', found in the attitude and practice of Ramakrishna Vedanta towards woman as the potential shakti, which is an

imperative for interior illumination (exemplified gloriously in the Holy Mother's life). This brings us to another challenge emerging again from 'desire' as embodied woman.

Challenges: Tantra

The most formidable challenge to the interpretation of Ramakrishna as a *sādhaka* and Ramakrishna Vedanta as a path of *sādhanā* now seems to stem from the larger Western landscape of Tantra studies in general and the focusing on Ramakrishna in particular. The work by scholars such as Mircea Eliade, Erich Neuman, Ken Wilber (notably his recent *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*), Georg Fuerstein, Julius Evola, Herbert Guenther, Indra Sinha, and Gunter Nitschke has focused on what they contend as sexual origins and foregrounding of spirituality. They seem to strongly endorse Paul Ricoeur's assertion that 'it is not possible, in point of fact, to understand the adventurous history of sexuality apart from that of the sacred among men.'

One can see this also as an important aspect of the 'feminist' discourse of desire 'interwoven with gender issues and values'. To be more precise, as Kim Power in her remarkable study of St. Augustine's writings on women observed: 'The Christian discourse of desire sets up a choice between woman and God, wherein the sexually desirable woman is represented as being in direct conflict with God for the hearts of men. The other side of the coin is that properly ordered desire for God will eradicate disorderly desire for women.'[17]

Tantra — specially, the left handed one — is seen by many as a way out of the paradox. Yati calls it 'perhaps the most exotic and at its initial ritual levels certainly the most erotic', 'of all the methods arousing the evolutionary sleeper.'[18] Julius Evola notes that 'the idea of arising and of assuming the forces of desire' in order to make them 'self-consuming, that is, to transform or, better, to destroy their original nature finds its most classical expression in Tantra.'[19] He goes a step further and claims, interestingly, that Tantra is more Western than Christian:

> Tantrism, in its spirit — leaving out of consideration the framework of local traditions — should be considered distinctly Western. It is more conspicuously Western than Christian soteriology, which proclaims an ideal

> of salvation from a world that is looked upon as a 'vale of tears' and contemplates the destiny of a human nature that has been infected with sin and that stands in need of redemption.... (ibid).

Commenting on the implications, Evola adds that 'the password of Tantrism is not the incompatibility, but rather unity of spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) and enjoyment (*bhoga*)....' (ibid).

Obviously, Western explorations of Ramakrishna's *sādhanā* as a Tantric pose a real challenge in at least three interconnected facets: the according of primacy to the varied phases of Ramakrishna's *sādhanā*, the role of canonization in hagiography, and the nature of language in scriptural texts.

Tantra as the Primary Mode of Perception

Ever since Lex Hixon[20] suggested the crucial significance of Tantra in Ramakrishna's *sādhanā*, several studies took the cue and elaborated the implications. In fact, the assigning of primary significance to Advaita in the hierarchy of Ramakrishna's *sādhanā* and teachings, these studies contend, is arbitrary and contrary to 'facts'. This is merely institutionally supported canonization and not a factually warranted interpretation. Walter G. Neevel's essay[21] is a trendsetter in this regard, but the most extreme psychoanalytical extension of the implicit issues are the studies by Narasingha P. Sil[22] and Jeffrey J. Kripal.[23] The latter, while more scholarly and having the merit of studying texts in original Bengali, is nevertheless highly polemical, if not, at many places, pathological, 'torturing' texts for meaning, with the 'erotic' as the only semantic referent. And it shows a colossal ignorance of the functioning of linguistic frames in Indian hermeneutic traditions.

Radical Academic 'Assault'

However, one important issue which really poses a challenge is: how far, or how long, can one regard Ramakrishna as impervious to further, more radical, appropriations in the light and context of more serious involvement of the scholarly, academic world. The academic world will bring all the scholarly apparatus with it, establishing authenticity of texts, the problem of allegedly

'intentional' omissions of passages in translated texts, the new historical perspective of religion as one of the discourses of signification among many, etc. Above all, scholars these days are notoriously deconstructive, ferreting out small details ignored (or wilfully 'suppressed') earlier.

These perspectives are strengthened by another trend: many Western scholars of Ramakrishna Vedanta are today attempting to get to the originals in Bengali without reliance on any 'mediated' text (mediated texts are generally 'meditated' texts!). Thus, at least one complete translation of the *Kathāmrita*, claimed to be the only unexpurgated one, with explanatory notes is now available as a doctoral work.[24] Exposure to variations between the 'canonised' texts and the originals is, to say the least, intriguing to the Western mind which is now arriving at notions of texts strongly at variance with the Hindu hermeneutic traditions.

These scholars, almost predictably, see sharp differences between Ramakrishna in the *Gospel* and Ramakrishna in the *Great Master*. Almost invariably the preference is for the *Gospel* image. And, with originals now available, the allegedly 'secret' passages 'omitted' in the English version of the *Gospel* are explored minutely; and, again invariably, these passages are given the Tantric slant with its undergrid of eroticism. With the Freudian 'mirch masala' (salt and pepper) thrown in, Ramakrishna emerges as a Tantric of the *vāmācāra*. Here is a context fraught with implications transcending the immediate contexts.

Language: The Key

The central question here seems to me not a question of translation but the entire problem of hermeneutics or the religious implications of language. As Ernst Fuchs has put it elaborating his hermeneutical doctrine, 'language is not the abbreviation of thinking, but thinking is an abbreviation of language.'[25] This is especially true of religious thought.

Language in religious contexts, though drawing from the common denotational linguistic pool, has connotative implications which purely secular decoding can almost never interpret properly. For instance, words used in Bengali (which, one should note, is heavily Sanskritized) such as *ramaṇa*, *krīḍā*, *uddipana*, *prema*, *dhāraṇā*, *bīja* are certainly tractable to erotic decoding. But that particular register has, in the context of Ramakrishna's use, no sexual

implications unless in an extremely irrational deconstructive myopia one is incapable of distinguishing the two entirely different realms of sexuality and spirituality. Charles Malamoud,[26] in a recent study, suggests, that 'the image we have of the limpid beginnings of the immortals' Sanskrit language is one that we may deduce from the great pains taken to obscure it', and 'through scrambling of phonemes' suggest this obscurity.

Erotic interpretations of Ramakrishna's emotive language and imagery are therefore, to use his own telling image, absorbing the *ucchiṣṭa*, the tainted, the defiled. Thus to deconstruct (or, rather, to dismember) is a tribute to one's ingenious interpretive skills but hardly defensible. Even the so-called excesses of *vāmācāra* will, perhaps, recoil at this absurd reduction of Tantra *sādhanā* to eroticism, imbuing it with all-pervasive permutations and combinations of 'abbreviated' Freudian assumptions. In short, ferreting out the '*gupta*' — the insight for the initiated alone — need not be regarded as unearthing the 'grotesquely' erotic; or rather, the secret need not be equated with the sordid. But once the equation is drawn, then the simplistic bracketing of *samādhi* with auto-eroticism and self-indulgence of the worst kind becomes a predictable phenomenon. This is just the culmination of a process described so accurately by William Irwin Thompson talking about the 'reductionist thinking' of sociobiology. He says that 'it reduces a psychological or cultural complex to a gene, and then it conceptualizes a gene as a hunk of matter rather than a crystal of sacred geometry and frozen music.'[27] In short, so far as Ramakrishna as a Tantric is concerned 'the camouflaged passions and murky reasoning' of Freudians are certainly negligible for the devotee but challenging to the scholar. And most scholars Ramakrishna saw as vultures, a species proliferating in academic skies.

In short, 'the awakening of *kuṇḍalinī* knows quite a different relationship...between language and sexuality.' One certainly needs to keep the entire matrix of the *sphoṭa* theory for decoding Ramakrishna's language. Here is a necessity for caution between what Heidegger called the evil of 'provocative disclosure' instead of procreative disclosure.' The provocative disclosure is 'only out to rob that which is to be discovered, of all that might be of some use; in contrast to the exploiting, grabbing, disclosure stands the 'procreative one, in which that which is to be discovered or revealed is to be brought with all possible care into its own true and full being.'

Madness

Along with Tantra, 'madness' is seen by a few Western academic enthusiasts as one of the 'central hermeneutic' principles to reckon with Ramakrishna. Interpretations range from seeing even his *nirvikalpa samādhi* as 'parental loss' consequent to Totapuri's (the submerged parental figure) departure from Dakshineswar, to those which continue to see it as an epileptic fit. For instance, Timothy Jensen interprets Ramakrishna's insanity 'as not incidental either to his period of intensive meditational practices or his teaching, for in his understanding it was precisely through "madness" that God is realised, and it is through madmen that God speaks.'[28]

This suggests, in fact, a distinction, argues Jensen, (a dichotomy) 'which has repeatedly been seen between the one who has realized God and the conventional, even by pious householder.' In short, while all madmen cannot be 'said to have realized God', madness is 'the closest *human* analogue to Ramakrishna's realisation of the divine, in his own eyes and perhaps in those of his disciples as well....'

But far more significant frames are suggested by Carl Olson. Placing Ramakrishna alongside saints such as St. Francis of Assisi, Olson sees madness as a negation of 'reasoning or rational argument based on scripture', which prevents one from 'direct realization'. As in the case of 'other ascetics and saints before him', Ramakrishna's madness 'functions as a symbol of the holy person, the divine-intoxicated one, the realiser of ultimate reality, or the liberated one.' In addition to demonstrating wide mood swings, such a state of mind — insanity — is an indication that that life represents one's final birth. The mad individual is no longer subject to the cycle of time. In this sense, Ramakrishna's madness, concludes Olson, 'is a celebration of his freedom and a manifestation of it.'[29] The sanity of divine madness unhinges the insanity of the ordinary. As Thomas Merton put it: 'the whole concept of sanity in a society where spiritual values have lost their meaning is itself meaningless.'

Thus Ramakrishna's 'madness' is a challenge to cognitive maps extant in the West. Controversies of common notions of rationality, emphasis on direct perception, the transcending of time and the cycles of birth, and an extraordinary range of 'mood swings' without a trace of abnormality — all these features suggest that the theories of cognition need radical updating. If updated in all

its implications, we get in Ramakrishna an extremely effective perception of the world, and the Incarnation who 'sports' in it with *līlā* (cognitive) and *nitya* as its alternate currents.

The Incarnation

'Ramakrishna's mystical experience with Jesus in 1874', says Daniel Bassuk, 'is highly significant as it marks the beginning of the assimilation of Jesus Christ into the Hindu religion on par with the Hindu Avatars. From this time forward, the Hindu God-men have a spiritual brother in Sri Isha, another Avatar to contend with, and a western one at that.'[30]

'Contend with' are important words for, as Beatrice Bruteau says, this is a 'challenge in the Eastern attitude toward the divine incarnation'. Quoting Sri Ramakrishna's words that 'when an incarnation comes, a tidal wave of spirituality breaks upon the world', Bruteau spells out the Hindu point of view:

> From the Hindu point of view, for one religion to claim that its hero alone is the only incarnation is small-minded in several ways: bigoted, ignorant of world history, unaware of the largeness of God, spiritually undeveloped, immature, and leads to hostility rather than harmony.

This is, she says,

> a severe challenge, but one that has to be faced in a world that is truly global now, in which we are all drawing closer together, sharing our lives more and more intimately.

These are insights largely shared by many students of the religious situation today. Dialogue on the inclusive pluralism is increasingly heard. As Rev. Kenneth Cracknell, conceding that 'there are indeed some black spots, places where the challenge has gone unheeded', says, 'taken as a whole, the picture gives us grounds for hope: men and women all over... have set out on the way of dialogue, and dialogue will lead to discovery and the discovery will be of God greater than our feeble thought had deemed possible.' Finally, Diana L. Eck points out that 'plurality of religions is not interpreted as a problem to overcome. It is a fact of our world. And it is one we must encounter creatively if we are to make sense of the world.'[31]

Seen against this background, for the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement this could mean the challenge of interfaith dialogue as 'assimilation' of a 'faceless' nature. Thus Ramakrishna ceases to retain his 'uniqueness' as Incarnate Divinity. Of course, to 'Hinduize' Ramakrishna is improper, but more than this to 'universalize' him as on par with global marketing strategies is, again, to make him an anonymous non-entity.

In this respect the equating of Ramakrishna and Christ has to be achieved with sensitivity and experiential spirituality. For instance, Hans Torwesten's insight could as well be an effective frame: 'What makes Ramakrishna so Christ-like' he says, 'is that we can speak of an unknown Christ of Hinduism with a slight and yet momentous shift in meaning which the Indian theologian gave to the title of his book, not a Christ hidden in Hindu philosophy, but a Christ who lived a hundred years ago and is still unknown to most Christians.'[32]

Līlā as a Comprehensive Cognitive Map

The 'momentous' shift in meaning is actually the challenge of redefining the new model of the universe as conforming to and confirming the Great Master's central perception of the universe as *līlā*, the playful enactment of the fun-loving Mother, the placing of 'Goddessliness' and its femininity at the centre of things. So if things fall apart, we have a second coming.

Līlā has evoked tremendous interest, apart from Bettina Baumer's pioneering work (and the seminal essay by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy), the very idea is now regarded as constituting a crucial hermeneutic tool for interpretation across boundaries. The idea of *līlā*, as William S. Sax says in a recent volume on the subject, 'appears to mark a delightful difference between European and South Asian traditions, embodying an Indic dimension in Indian religious life that is muted or even absent in the dominant religions of the West.' Noting that 'though there may be examples of 'playfulness' in Judaism, Christianity or Islam, still it seems fair to say that Hinduism had developed the doctrine of play more than any of the other so-called world religions, and that this idea has supported, particularly in the most recent religious history of the subcontinent, a pervasive attitude of joy and delight in God's *līlā*.'[33]

The centrality of *līlā* in Ramakrishna can hardly be exaggerated. As Malcolm McLean in a recent essay on the subject of *līlā* has put it, Ramakrishna

'is fond of stressing the wilfulness of the Mother, her right to do with us and the world whatever she chooses.' But his *līlā* — a constant theme that manifests itself through Ramakrishna's life — constitutes several challenges: wilfulness, unpredictability, the assumption of several aspects, including madness, are certainly challenges to neat mechanistic models of the universe. In other words, if all these negative aspects are put in the metaphors of Advaita, it is to allow the illusion of rope and snake to resolve itself not in terms of reality but of play. As Arthur C. Danto has observed: 'When the snake gives way to the rope, the principles worked out for coping with snakes are not invalidated as such, but merely put out of play.'[34]

Ramakrishna would still say that putting something out of play is not ceasing to be part of the play but to catch the Mother, as children do in the game of hide and seek. Then one becomes a passive participant, a *sākṣī*. Then if bad things happen to good people, good people play along and do not feel inclined to be bad since *līlā* requires both for dramatic continuity.

Thus *līlā* and our participation in it is an effective analogue for the meditative practice itself in which 'you are the actor, you are the one who is plowing' or, one can add, 'playing'. *Līlā* predicates a balanced picture (stemming from *bhāvamukha*) or the order emerging out of chaos. This is a challenging paradigm which resolves several anomalies without dissolving them — a fact evident in Ramakrishna's life itself.

Conclusion

In his study of the contemporary 'quest for wisdom' in the US, Tony Schwarz says:

> The flowering of more comprehensive approaches to wisdom, uniting the best of the East and West represents a historic first. Never before have we had access to so many technologies of transformation or to so much knowledge about the full spectrum of human possibility...these comprehensive approaches, perhaps never before have been so desperately needed.[35]

Achieving 'comprehensive' spirituality is a challenge Ramakrishna Vedanta both poses and receives. It has to receive, specially, the nearly imperative

need to interpret Ramakrishna Vedanta *śruti* in the light of Western *smṛtis* — without privileging either. Entering polemics is no answer; intensifying inner resources — perennial in their originating purity — is.

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EPILOGUE

World Thinkers on Ramakrishna Movement

PRAVRAJIKA VRAJAPRANA

Introduction

VICTOR HUGO wrote in the middle of the nineteenth century:[1] 'An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come.' By the end of the twentieth century, the new science of memetics had been created: the study of how self-propagating ideas or *memes* are transmitted. As effective at replicating as a virus, memes are transmitted from person to person, culture to culture, changing and shaping the world through the force of powerful ideas.

Initially coined in 1976 by the influential evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, memes have been found to transmit in various ways: through the family, through proselytism, through the power of fear or the power of greed. One particularly potent impetus in idea transmission is the power of authority — the power of the credentialed. 'Those holding a doctorate, professional licence, or clergy post…gain more access to minds than those lacking such distinctions', memetics expert Aaron Lynch observed.[2]

The power of authority is of particular interest to us, for intellectual and cultural leaders have consistently been some of the most effective vehicles for spreading the ideas and ideals of the Ramakrishna Movement throughout the world. If ideas can be transmitted like so many subtle viruses, the way in which the thoughts of the Ramakrishna Movement have spread is more like the creation of a great, intricate web. Like a spider's delicate filigree that is

first spun then lightly thrown across a vast expanse, so the ideas of the Ramakrishna Movement first began with one gossamer thread: that thread was then thrown to another continent then connected to another and yet again to another. As time went on, an invisible tapestry of powerful ideas was created that has fundamentally changed the way that millions of people think about the world and about themselves.

Charles H. Tawney

The first tentative thread whose far-reaching influence we now see was a brief article by Charles H. Tawney, Professor of Sanskrit at Calcutta University and Librarian of India House in London. Entitled 'A Modern Hindu Saint' and published in January of 1896 by *The Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Professor Tawney referred to Sri Ramakrishna as a saint, a sage, and a true mystic. Aware of British bigotry, and perhaps not immune to it himself, Tawney invoked a mild disclaimer: 'Whatever may be thought of the culture of the Saint Ramakrishna' — only to deliver a winning finale — 'it is impossible to read his sayings without conceiving a genuine respect for him.'[3] Considering that the recipient of his admiration was an uneducated, unapologetic heathen under the rule of the Crown, these were strong words indeed.

Max Müller

Amazingly, Tawney's article didn't remain buried within the pages of the journal. This tenuous thread was thrown across the world of ideas and was quickly picked up by European scholars, the most notable of which was F. Max Müller, the venerable dean of European Orientalists. Born in 1823, Müller was the son of Heinrich Müller, one of Germany's most acclaimed poets and scholars. In 1848 Max Müller moved to Oxford where he remained until his death in 1900. While famed in England as a renowned scholar, Müller was equally respected for his active engagement in the cultural and political questions of the day.

By anyone's standards, Müller's literary output was enormous. Not only did he edit and translate such classics as the six-volume *Ṛg-Veda Samhitā*, the *Dhammapāda*, and the Upaniṣads, his own original work on the Indian tradition

included such titles as *Lectures on the Origins and Growth of Religions as Illustrated by the Religions of India*; *India, What Can It Teach Us?*; *Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings*; and *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*. Between 1879 and 1894 he edited the monumental fifty-volume series *The Sacred Books of the East*, and in 1895 the series *The Sacred Books of the Buddhists* began under Müller's editorship.

Few scholars have attained the wide respect and recognition that Müller achieved in his lifetime, and time has not corroded earlier assessments. Contemporary American Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass concluded that Müller's contribution to religious studies and linguistics was 'quite influential'.[4] It was therefore of no small consequence when Müller declared Vedanta to be the 'acme' of human thought.[5] It was also no wonder that when Müller became captivated with Sri Ramakrishna, the rest of the world took notice. His interest first piqued by Professor Tawney, Müller followed up this initial exposure by reading Sri Ramakrishna's teachings which were published in the *Brahmavadin* and also by meeting Pratap Chandra Majumdar, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj who had known the Master.

With the August 1896 publication of Müller's 'A Real Mahatman' in *The Nineteenth Century*, another powerful thread was thrown across the world. '*Ramakrishna Paramahansa*', he wrote, 'seems to have been not only a high-souled man, a real mahātman, but a man of original thought.' Continuing in this vein, Müller noted that the Mahātma's mind was 'saturated with religious thoughts and with the sublimest ideas of goodness and purity.' Mentioning Sri Ramakrishna's ecstatic states, Müller cautioned that these experiences were 'not mere hypnotic jabbering, but a spontaneous outburst of profound wisdom clothed in beautiful poetical language. His mind seems like a Kaleidoscope of pearls, diamonds, and sapphires shaken together at random but always producing precious thoughts in regular, beautiful outlines.'[6]

In his conclusion Müller declared that by reading Sri Ramakrishna's sayings 'we learn that...the fervent love of God, nay the sense of complete absorption in the Godhead, has nowhere found a stronger and more eloquent expression than in the utterances of Ramakrishna.'[7]

Considering Müller's stature, one can hardly be surprised that his article created quite a stir, both positive and negative. The stir only served as a relish to Müller's existing fascination with Sri Ramakrishna; the end result was a

book, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, published two years before his death. Referring to Sri Ramakrishna as 'a wonderful mixture of God and man',[8] Müller first discussed Sri Ramakrishna's life, the facts of which were given him by no less than Swami Vivekananda with Swami Saradananda's help. The second portion of the book was composed of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings.

The effect of Müller's book was far-reaching and profound. Religious historian Hans J. Klimkeit observed that for Müller, 'scholarship was to serve the understanding between peoples. In this respect, his work facilitated an understanding of the Indian traditions in the Western world.'[9] Dr. Klimkeit's astute comment verifies not only Müller's influence on the Western interest in Eastern thought, but more specifically, his influence on the spread of the Ramakrishna Movement. The threads from Müller's book on Sri Ramakrishna spread far and wide: suddenly the grand tapestry of the Ramakrishna Movement in the world of ideas seemed larger than ever before; the Ramakrishna Movement memes were moving rapidly into the world.

Leo Tolstoy

Of all the places for interest in the Ramakrishna Movement to sprout, Russia seemed one of the most unlikely. For although the *Bhagavad Gita* was published in Russia in 1788 — the first book on Indian philosophy ever published there — Russia had scant contact with India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and books on Indian spirituality were more or less non-existent.

Given this background, the appearance of both Tawney's 'A Modern Indian Saint' and Müller's 'A Real Mahatma' followed by *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* in 1896 is remarkable. Again the threads that seemed imperceptible were more securely fastened than anyone could have suspected. As it so happened, 1896 turned out to be a banner year for the incipient Ramakrishna Movement in Russia, for it was also in that year that Leo Tolstoy — one of the greatest writers the world has seen — received a copy of *Rāja-Yoga*. 'The book is most remarkable and I have received much instruction from it,' Tolstoy wrote the sender, Anendra Kumar Datta. 'The metaphysical side of the doctrine, the precept as to what the true "I" of a man is, is excellent. So far humanity has frequently gone backwards from the true and lofty and clear conception of the principle of life, but never surpassed it.'[10]

Omnivorous intellect that he was, it is remarkable that Tolstoy's interest in Vivekananda and his ideas never waned: it remained with him until his final days, and he shared his interest with his contemporaries. Writing to the famed musician Dilip Kumar Roy, Romain Rolland said: 'You will be surprised, Dilip, if I tell you that Tolstoy, in the last years of his life, was charmed by Vivekananda s writings. Tolstoy's close friend, P. Biryukov, and numerous other scholars keep chanting Vivekananda's name even now. In Russia, specially, there are even more of such people.' To this Roy replied: 'That they are so influenced by Vivekananda I did not know. All I knew was that Tolstoy, in the last years of his life, was charmed by Vivekananda, and this because a Bengali friend of mine had sent to him... a copy of Vivekananda's *Rāja-Yoga*. Tolstoy had later written to him, "It is doubtful if in this age [another] man has ever risen above this selfless spiritual meditation".'[11]

It wasn't until 1903 that Tolstoy discovered Sri Ramakrishna by reading the German journal *Theosophiser Wegweier*. Tolstoy underlined Sri Ramakrishna's aphorisms and wrote in his diary, 'Much here is the same as my own understanding.' In 1906 excerpts from Max Müller's *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa* were sent to Tolstoy. Referring to the book, Tolstoy told a friend that Müller's 'selection of the "sayings" is wonderful. Ramakrishna died 50 [sic] years ago. The most brilliant wise man!'[12] Interestingly, up to this point at least, Tolstoy did not know that Swami Vivekananda was Sri Ramakrishna's disciple.

In 1908 I. F. Nazhivin translated 'My Master', 'God and Man', and 'Hymn of Creation' into Russian — the first Russian translation of Swami Vivekananda. Enthused, Tolstoy wrote Nazhivin, 'The Hindu's article has left a great impression on me. This is unusually good.'[13]

It was also in 1908 that two volumes of Swamiji's *Complete Works* were sent to Tolstoy. Underling words and taking notes on what he read, Tolstoy was deeply impressed. 'Since six in the morning I have been thinking of Vivekananda', Tolstoy told his friend D. P. Makovitsky. 'Yesterday, read Vivekananda the whole day.... Very talentedly written.'[14] In his 1908 article 'Religion and Science', Tolstoy shares his appreciation of Vivekananda with his larger reading audience. As the Russian scholar A. P. Gnatyuk-Danil'Chuk noted, '[Tolstoy] virtually says that mankind must assimilate the heritage of Vivekanada along with that of the other sages.'[15] In this article Tolstoy writes,

'The task before the leading thinkers of mankind now...is to show the inevitability and need of what has ever been regarded as Prajña [knowledge]. And to show that this knowledge was long known to mankind and manifested itself both in the teaching of religion as well as in the teachings of the sages, not only Indian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman, but also the later ones unto the very last: Kant, Schopenhauer, Vivekananda.'[16]

Tolstoy continued to study and to benefit from Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna until his death in 1910. Discussing the Russian philosophical tract known as the *Vekhi*, Tolstoy wrote in 1909, 'It is not worth reading, the *Vekhi*... when one has such [things] for reading such as Ramakrishna, the Buddha, Vivekananda, the Gospel....'[17] In the same year Tolstoy spoke to his publishing house, wanting to create an anthology of Swamiji's sayings. 'The most eminent of modern Indian thinkers is Vivekananda', he asserted, 'and he should be published.'[18] Sadly, Tolstoy could not achieve his goal before his death the following year.

Tolstoy's contribution to the Ramakrishna Movement did not end with his death, however, for Tolstoy's followers arranged for a Russian translation of a number of Swamiji's writings, along with the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and Max Müller's volume. There is no doubt that Tolstoy's interest in and appreciation for Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna greatly helped to spread the ideas of the Ramakrishna Movement. In 1914 *The Message of Ramakrishna* was published — not mere pamphlet, this 300-page book included a preface by Swami Abhedananda and was the largest pre-Revolution book on Sri Ramakrishna. In 1915 a small booklet limning the life of Sri Ramakrishna was published. After this, publications ceased due to the Revolution. However we should note that these works were carefully preserved, copied, and circulated underground during the long years of religious repression. That cloud removed from the spiritual horizon, the Ramakrishna Movement in Russia is now resurgent, breathing new life into the spiritual and intellectual atmosphere there.

Romain Rolland

The name Romain Rolland has already been invoked in passing; now more needs to be said for his name figures mightily in the spread of the

Ramakrishna Movement memes. In his day Rolland was considered the greatest living French writer. Having won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915, some of his works were translated into thirty-five languages. His words were respected, his influence profound. Rolland was above all a humanist who felt deeply for others, particularly those whose voices were never heard — those suffering from poverty, fear, or moral or political enslavement. A confirmed idealist, Rolland wrote historical dramas, novels, and essays to flesh out his humanitarian worldview.

Josephine MacLeod was both the direct and indirect instrument through which Rolland discovered Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda; both means were equally important. The first thread of the web that caught Rolland was Dhan Gopal Mukherji's book on Sri Ramakrishna, *The Face of Silence*. Printed in English in 1926, it was chosen by the league of Nations as one of the best forty outstanding books of 1926 and as such was chosen for the International Library of Geneva.[19] It was Josephine MacLeod who 'discovered' the twenty-three year old Mukherji in America. Impressed by the young man's brilliance, she inspired him to write about Sri Ramakrishna, infusing in him her knowledge of the Movement and her zeal. Writing to her sister in 1914, Miss MacLeod said, 'I've poured out all my heart of all the wealth that Swamiji poured into me — on him [Dhan Gopal] — and now my work is done and feel a curious lightness.'[20]

Through Josephine MacLeod many crucial threads of the Ramakrishna Movement's web were thrown worldwide: her vibrant enthusiasm for the ideals of the Movement never slackened throughout her entire long life. Always moving in the higher circles of the world's intellectual, cultural, and civic leaders, she preached Swamiji's ideals wherever she went and to whomever she spoke. Her enthusiasm was genuinely infectious. Her great glory was that she infected so many prominent thinkers who in turn infected many, many others. Josephine MacLeod utilized memes with a vengeance. Acknowledging this fact, Swami Shivananda wrote to her in 1927, 'It is for this work Swamiji has left you still in the world — and making you to scour round the world in search of great men.'[21] Such indeed was the case of Dhan Gopal Mukherji and Romain Rolland.

Hearing of Rolland's interest, Miss MacLeod sent him a number of books on Swamiji and Sri Ramakrishna. Books were followed up by frequent visits

to his home in Switzerland in 1927. Characteristically, she spoke constantly and passionately of Swamiji and the ideals he represented. The end result of her fostering was the publication of *La Vie de Ramakrishna* [The Life of Ramakrishna] in 1929 and *La Vie de Vivekananda et L'Evangile Universel* [The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel] in 1930. Because of the author's stature, the books were soon translated into various languages and widely read. In 1936 the books were even translated into Russian.[22]

Romain Rolland's descriptions of both Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji are some of the loveliest written. Not only is the prose elegant, but the author's obvious love for his subjects conveys more than a mere intellectual appreciation. Take, for instance, his description of Swamiji's words:

> His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses. I cannot touch these sayings of his, scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks, what transports must have been produced when in burning words they issued from the lips of the hero![23]

Rolland was completely captured by this hero — not totally surprising since Rolland shared Vivekananda's great love for humanity. Rolland wrote that Swamiji's 'universal soul was rooted in its human soul; and the smallest pang suffered by its inarticulate flesh sent a repercussion through the whole tree.'[24] Swamiji's true spiritual testament, Rolland wrote, was 'to be found in the beautiful confidences he made out of the abundance of his heart one day when he was talking to some Santhal workmen... Vivekananda loved them dearly; he mingled with a group of them, talking to them, making them talk, weeping in sympathy as they related their simple sorrows. One day he served a beautiful feast for them at which he said "You are Narayana; today I have entertained Narayana Himself".'[25]

Reiterating the point, Rolland wrote that not long before Swamiji's death he said, '"He alone is worshipping God, who serves all beings"... Like the setting sun it breaks forth from the clouds before disappearing in resplendent glory; the Equality of all men, all sons of the same God, all bearing the same God. And there is no other God. He who wishes to serve God, must serve man.'[26]

Rolland discovered in Swamiji a person who completely embodied his own ideals. What is truly remarkable is that, given Rolland's temperament and outlook, how much he was able to appreciate Sri Ramakrishna. Not only did Rolland understand the wonderful complementarity between the Master and the disciple, he was also able to see Sri Ramakrishna's profound love for humanity. Sri Ramakrishna, he wrote, 'was the tender brother of everything that lives and dies, and had drunk so deep of the milk of loving kindness that he could not be satisfied with a happiness he could not share with others.'[27]

More importantly, Rolland understood that Sri Ramakrishna was vastly more than an ideal human being. 'The man whose image I here evoke', he wrote in his book on Sri Ramakrishna, 'was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people.'[28] But Sri Ramakrishna was still more than this: 'Allowing for the differences of country and of time, Ramakrishna is the younger brother of our Christ.'[29] Bold, grand words these were, and we continue to hear their echo today. For example:

Henry Miller

In 1945 the author Henry Miller decided to return to America from Paris, reacquainting himself with his native land by making a cross-country American journey. 'Now that the trip is over', Miller later wrote in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, 'I must confess that the experience which stands out most strongly in my mind is the reading of Romain Rolland's two volumes on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda... [and] the most masterful individual, the only person I met whom I could truly call "a great soul", was a quiet Hindu swami in Hollywood.'[30]

In fact, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* opens with a 'Citation from Swami Vivekananda', consisting of two long quotations which absorb almost one full page. Throughout the book Miller mentions both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Referring to Sri Ramakrishna as 'the very incarnation of love and wisdom', he adds several pages later: 'I was full of Ramakrishna on leaving Pittsburgh. Ramakrishna who never criticized, who never preached, who accepted all religions, who saw God everywhere in everything: the most ecstatic being, I imagine, that ever lived.'[31]

In another portion of the book Miller quotes Romain Rolland's *Life of Vivekananda* for nearly one full page and writes of Swamiji's triumph at the 1893 Parliament of Religions.[32] Speaking of his own reaction to Rolland's book, Miller writes:

> I had just been reading Rolland's book on Vivekananda; I had put it down because I couldn't read any more, my emotions were so powerful. The passage which roused me to such a state of exaltation was the one in which Rolland describes Vivekananda's triumphal return to India from America. No monarch ever received such a reception at the hands of his countrymen: it stands unique in the annals of history.... All India greeted him with open arms; millions of people prostrated themselves before him, saluting him as a saint and saviour, which he was.... It was a triumph of love, of gratitude, of devotion.... His clean, powerful words [were] spoken like a fearless champion not of India but of the human race.[33]

Miller bemoaned the fact that Sri Ramakrishna was virtually unknown in America: 'Millions of benighted Americans are able today to glibly reel off such names as Picasso, Strawinski [sic], Joyce, Freud, Einstein,... *et cetera*.... Ramakrishna — probably not one out of a hundred thousand ever heard of that name, nor are they apt to as long as they live.... What am I driving at? Just this — that there is something cock-eyed in this best of all democratic worlds about the manner in which vital information is disseminated.'[34]

Here is a man so moved by what be reads that he wishes all the world to share in his exaltation, and he is clearly distressed that his American kinsmen will not have this opportunity. At least not in his lifetime. Yet what is fascinating about this situation is that Henry Miller is not an author whose name would appear on a typical Vedanta recommended reading list. Known for his steamy, explicit novels, Miller would seem to be the person least likely to be influenced by the Ramakrishna Movement. But influenced he was, and deeply. In a letter to the managing editor of Vedanta Press in 1962, Miller wrote, 'I can only say that Swami Vivekananda remains for me one of the great influences in my life — one of the great exemplars.'[35] Today there are prominent devotees of the Ramakrishna Movement who discovered Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji by reading, of all people, Henry Miller.

Thought currents — memes — are powerful, electrifying those whose minds are receptive enough to receive the impulse. Miller — galvanized himself by the meme issuing from Romain Rolland — was an able instrument to pass additional memes along the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda thought current. Today Miller is considered a major literary figure, judged by many to be one of the great writers of the twentieth century. Elected to the American National Institute of Art and Letters in 1958, he was awarded the French Legion of Honour in 1975.

The 'Swami in Hollywood' that Miller refers to was, of course, Swami Prabhavananda. Miller met him only once but the meeting 'left a great impression on my mind', as he wrote the Swami in 1956.[36] As Miller later wrote, 'I shall remember [him] to the end of my days.'[37] That Hollywood Swami attracted other prominent intellectual and cultural leaders whose thought currents are still making more strands in the tapestry of the Ramakrishna Movement. But we are moving ahead of ourselves. To understand more of the tapestry's matrix we need to return to Europe, specifically to Germany, where the great Indologist and mythologist Heinrich Zimmer was born in 1890.

Heinrich Zimmer

Zimmer was the son of one of Germany's pioneer Indologists, also named Heinrich Zimmer, and soon the son overshadowed the father in every accomplishment. His brilliance detected early, he taught first at Oxford, then at John Hopkins in America, and finally at Columbia University. Zimmer's name is frequently associated with two other great intellectuals who have changed the way we think about the world: Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. Both of these personalities figure prominently in the great intellectual web of the Ramakrishna Movement. Both of these men were close friends of, and were greatly influenced by, Heinrich Zimmer.

Zimmer's contribution to twentieth-century religious philosophy was unique and long-lasting. His interest in Indian philosophy in particular changed the way many Westerners look upon the East. 'Zimmer's passionate interest in Indian thought and spirituality as witnesses to the universal aspiration of the human spirit marked something of a departure from contemporary and immediately preceding continental approaches to the study of India's religions',

religious historian G. R. Welbon wrote. 'Zimmer', he continued, 'was among the first in the twentieth century to urge that understanding the adventure of Indian religious and philosophical thought would help one better understand one's own situation in the world.... Rather than holding the "alien" cultural material at arm's length, Zimmer embraced it.'[38]

Zimmer had a life-long desire to visit India which he was never able to fulfil. Tragically, at the height of his intellectual powers and at the apex of his career, he suddenly died of pneumonia in 1943. Joseph Campbell — who was introduced to Zimmer by Swami Nikhilananda at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York — became Zimmer's posthumous editor; fitting, since they were close friends and their interests dovetailed.

What could well be considered Zimmer's greatest work is his monumental opus, *Philosophies of India*. 'Unhesitatingly we call this a great book', Kurt Leidecker wrote in *The Personalist*. His opinion has been seconded by all. Published by the august Bollingen series of Princeton University Press, the book is currently in its ninth printing and is still widely read and esteemed. Scholarly yet lively, *Philosophies of India* gives no particular encomiums to Sri Ramakrishna. Zimmer's initial entry refers to Sri Ramkrishna as the 'celebrated Hindu saint of the nineteenth century', and on the same page he calls him 'the perfect embodiment of the orthodox religious philosophy of India.'[39] What is truly remarkable about this magnificent volume, however, is how prominently Sri Ramakrishna figures in the book and how frequently he is cited. Not only is he quoted frequently, he is quoted at length: several of Sri Ramkrishna's quotations run into several pages. By the end of the volume, one has read a significant selection of Sri Ramakrishna's words from Swami Nikhilananda's translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Joseph Campbell

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna reminds us of Zimmer's friend and editor, Joseph Campbell, who spent several years helping Swami Nikhilananda in his translation of the *Gospel*. Campbell also spent years assisting Swami Nikhilananda with his four-volume translation of the Upaniṣads along with his other literary efforts. In fact, as President of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York for some years, Campbell was a pivotal figure in the Centre itself.

It was in 1939 that one of Campbell's students — finding that Campbell's Schopenhauer lecture had rung an oddly familiar note — brought his mother's copy of Swami Nikhilananda's *Mandukya Upaniṣad* to his professor. With this, Campbell's life began a new course altogether. 'The most important thing for me this year was not the war', Campbell wrote in his journal in 1939, 'but the discovery of the *Mandukya Upaniṣad*.'[40] Campbell later recalled, 'I began reading the book November 30, 1939, and concluded February 17, 1940. Then I had a talk with Swami Nikhilananda.'[41] That talk had far-reaching effects. To quote Campbell's biography:

> This new contact with the world of Vedic philosophy made a profound impression on Campbell.... Campbell had already been enlisted by Swami Nikhilananda to help him edit his translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Even in Campbell's very latest years, he would quote the insights of the Hindu saint, so direct and refreshing they seemed to him as comments on the ineffable.... These insights permeated Campbell's later definition of 'bliss' and informed his ultimate theology: that the moment one began to talk about God, one was already in the realm of concepts and categories — a human knowledge, not divine. It was only in the wordless absorption of *nirvikalpa samādhi* that the human could unite with the transcendent Source. In effect, the experience could never be communicated. Yet the deepest portion of the insight, as it came to Ramakrishna, was that the Divine Source permeates all life. Though he accepted no personal guru, this was a credo by which Joseph Campbell found that he could live.[42]

In 1940 Campbell gave a talk at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre that was later printed in the November 1941 issue of the *Prabuddha Bharata*. In this talk he says: 'In Dakshineswar...practicing his *sādhanā*, not according to enlightened, modern methods, but after the most ancient, most superstitious, most idolatrous traditions of timeless India.... swooning in the ocean of the Mother's love; stunned by the experience of Brahman, Sri Ramakrishna cut the hinges of the heavens and released the fountains of divine bliss.'[43]

There are few intellectual giants whose names can truly be called 'household words', but Joseph Campbell is one such. 'Campbell has become the rarest of intellectuals in American life', K. C. Cole of *Newsweek* wrote, 'a serious thinker who has been embraced by the popular culture.'[44] Campbell's

breadth and depth of scholarship were every bit as great as his popular appeal. Campbell was considered the world's greatest authority on mythology and folklore; he was also a scholar who published an astonishing number of intellectually challenging books — many in the renowned Bollingen Series from Princeton. He was as well a popular teacher whose work had a profound influence on literally millions of people.

Campbell's last major project before his death in 1987 was a series of television interviews with the acclaimed television journalist, Bill Moyers. The series was broadcast in 1988 under the title 'The Power of Myth' and was an unparalleled success. It was estimated that some two and a half million people watched each episode. Campbell's audience was further enlarged when the series was later rebroadcast, then made available to the general public in video cassette form. The television series was also made into a best-selling book of the same title. In Moyers's introduction he mentions Campbell's appreciation for 'the Indian saint and sage Ramakrishna'; in the text itself he also quotes him.[45]

Throughout Campbell's copious writings we find Sri Ramakrishna quoted on a regular basis — his teaching and spiritual experiences are strewn in and throughout like nuggets of gold. On occasion the quotations are lengthy, sometimes quite brief. What is important, however, is that no reader of Joseph Campbell can escape Sri Ramakrishna. Very few twentieth-century thinkers have had the power of attraction Campbell possessed; as such his influence has been more profound than those who quoted Sri Ramakrishna more often or at greater length.

Carl Jung

The Ramakrishna Movement's pulse of ideas has flowed as much through personal contact as through literature. While Campbell and Zimmer were introduced to one another by Swami Nikhilananda, it was Zimmer who introduced Campbell to Carl Jung — one of the century's greatest and most influential intellects. By the time Campbell and Jung met, Zimmer and Jung had known each other for a number of years and were close friends. Jung admired Zimmer as much for his open-minded spiritual seeking as for his intellectual gifts. Zimmer was, according to Jung 'a spirit that overcame the

limitations of the specialist and, turning towards humanity, bestowed upon it the joyous gift of eternal fruit.'[46] It was precisely this quality that Jung himself possessed, the quality becoming more predominant as time passed and his thought developed.

When people in the Ramakrishna Movement think of Carl Jung, they tend to think of his earlier, yet undeveloped ideas about the East and spirituality. In his *Prabuddha Bharata* article of 1936, for example, Jung argues that Westerners were not suited for the practice for *yoga*. What has not been generally recognized, however, is how much Jung's ideas and attitudes matured and changed after that article was written. 'A careful look at his writings', Dr. Steven Walker wrote, '...reveals a slow and careful progress towards a greater acceptance of the relevance of Eastern mystical thought for the problems of the modern world.'[47]

We should remember that Jung went to India in the winter of 1936-37, *after* the publication of the *Prabuddha Bharata* article. It may well be that Jung's ideas changed as a result of, or were strongly influenced by, his visit to India and Belur Math in particular. All we can verify with certainty is that his basic outlook regarding spiritual practice in the East and West underwent a transformation.

One thing that certainly impressed Jung was the statue of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math. He later commented that, 'whatever the word *samādhi* might mean exactly, every Indian would associate it with the image of a yogi in that state.'[48] More importantly, as time went on, Jung began thinking of East and West not in opposition to one another, but instead as running along parallel lines. As his thought matured, 'Jung's psychology moved closer and closer to the wellsprings of Indian spirituality', Walker observes.[49]

In his 1939 article 'What India Can Teach Us', Jung praises India's integrative religion, seeing it as a model for the modern Western world. India's religion embraced 'the whole man from top to bottom' unlike the Western variety which separated the rational from the natural human being. Jung appreciatively concluded that India had avoided the 'fatal dissociation between an upper and a lower half of the human personality.'[50]

Jung's 1943 essay *The Psychology of Eastern Meditation* 'emphasizes over and over again the affinities that link Western spiritual aspirations with India and the East.... The European, writes Jung, should apply his Western

understanding "to understanding as much of *yoga* as is possible for the Western mind".'[51] In 1944 Jung wrote an essay as an introduction to Heinrich Zimmer's German translation of Ramana Maharshi's teachings. In this essay — now part of the Bollingen series entitled *Psychology and the East* — Jung presciently observes, 'The Eastern peoples are threatened with a rapid collapse of their spiritual values, and what replaces them cannot always be counted among the best that Western civilization has produced.'[52] Continuing in this line he adds, 'From this point of view one could regard Ramakrishna and Sri Ramana as modern prophets, who play the same compensatory role in relation to their people as that of the Old Testament prophets in relation to their "unfaithful" children of Israel. Not only do they exhort their compatriots to remember their thousand-year-old spiritual culture, they actually embody it and thus serve as an impressive warning, lest the demands of the soul be forgotten amid the novelties of Western civilization with its materialistic technology and commercial acquisitiveness.'[53]

We have certainly come a long way since the 1936 *Prabuddha Bharata* article! Quotations from Sri Ramakrishna also appear in this remarkable essay. Jung is particularly interested in how Sri Ramakrishna contends with the problem of the ego. 'The goal of Eastern religious practice is the same as that of Western mysticism', Jung wrote, 'the shifting of the centre of gravity from the ego to the self, from man to God.'[54] Dr. Walker concludes from Jung's essay that 'Jung has found in Ramakrishna's teachings a modern psychological and religious point of view with which he can agree — namely, that even if the dissolution of the ego is the goal of religion, the ego in practice is almost indestructible.'[55]

As a footnote we can add that the end of Jung's life was graced with transformative spiritual experiences that left him a changed man: 'I would never have imagined that any such experience was possible', he later wrote a close colleague. 'I have never since entirely freed myself of the impression that this life is a segment of existence which is entirely acted in a three-dimensional boxlike universe set up for it.'[56] These experiences — which included the vision of a Hindu yogi — were accompanied by 'an incomparable, indescribable feeling of eternal bliss, such as I never could have imagined as being within the reach of human consciousness.'[57] Not long before his death, Jung appeared on the BBC television series, 'Face to Face'. When asked whether

he believed in God, Jung replied with great intensity, 'I *know*. I don't need to believe. I know.'[58]

There is probably no more towering figure in psychology today than Jung. A half-century after his death, his influence is still continuing to grow. That fact is a happy one since of all the major Western psychologists, Jung was the one who had the greatest interest in the Ramakrishna Movement. Jung was greatly benefited by its teachings, and he has succeeded in spreading his own interest to successive generations.

William James

But Jung is not the only psychologist influenced by the Ramakrishna Movement. There is also William James, psychologist and philosopher, who met Swami Vivekananda and was influenced by his teachings on *Rāja-Yoga*. 'A very *nice* man, a very *nice* man!' Swamiji said, referring to Dr. James. In return, the father of American psychology referred to Swamiji as 'Master'.[59] William James was as influential as a human being could be in his day. Trained as a doctor, he taught physiology at Harvard until the late 1870s when he became absorbed in the study of psychology. Appointed as assistant professor of psychology at Harvard, he then became interested in philosophy; from 1885 until his retirement in 1907 he was professor of philosophy at Harvard.

If ever there was American royalty, the James family was so anointed. William and his younger brother Henry, the novelist, were America's *crème de la crème*. Each in his respective field was honoured and esteemed. Their contributions to Western literature, psychology, and philosophy are still acknowledged today. Of William James's contribution, J. A. Mourant has written, 'James, an original thinker and a brilliant writer, exerted a striking influence on contemporary philosophy as a whole. His interest in psychology resulted in his adoption of radical empiricism, which in turn led to pragmatism and his characteristic analysis of religious experience.'[60]

James, in his two-volume *Principles of Psychology*, rejected the mechanistic views of psychology then in vogue and also rejected the traditional dualism between mind and body, 'thought and thing'. James also rejected monism: external relations were real, he declared, because they were experienced

relations, and relations connected human experiences. Obviously on this point he and Swamiji could never agree. But what they certainly did agree on was the necessity of religious experience as the bedrock of religious belief. 'Although James rejected all traditional religious beliefs', Mourant continues, 'he felt that man's religious experience brought him in relation to a higher spiritual aspect of the universe. Such a higher or wider reality is a "something" greater than man.'[61]

However James might have disagreed with Swamiji on the concept of monism, there is no doubt that he had great reverence for him. Professor Wright of Harvard observed that James was 'swept off his feet' by Swamiji and took every opportunity to hear him speak.[62] James himself wrote Mrs. Ole Bull that '[Vivekananda]...is a man of genius, even though his Absolute be not the truth.'[63] James's interest in Vedanta did not begin and end with Swami Vivekananda. In 1898 James and Swami Abhedananda had a philosophical debate in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on the sticking point of monism. In 1900 James wrote Mrs. Bull that 'I have been reading some of Vivekananda's addresses... that man is simply a wonder of oratorical power. As for the doctrine of the One, I began to have some talk with that most interesting Miss Noble [Sister Nivedita] about it, but it was cut short, and I confess that my difficulties have never yet been cleared up. But the Swami is an honour to humanity in any case.'[64]

In William James's seminal book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (still in print and still influential), he quotes at length from *Rāja-Yoga* as well as from 'Practical Vedanta (Part IV)', 'Maya and Freedom', and 'The Real and the Apparent Man'. Here again we find the hand of Josephine MacLeod — for it was she who had lent these London lectures to him, thus confirming Swami Shivananda's declaration that her role was to serve Swamiji by seeking out great men. While James's quotations from Swami Vivekananda neither recommend nor criticize Vedanta — he uses them to illustrate monistic philosophy — it is nevertheless apparent that James does not support this attitude. As Marie Louise Burke has written regarding James's equally renowned book: 'In [James's] *Pragmatism*... however, he took definite issue with Swamiji. Characteristically, he did not do so without paying tribute to him, writing of the Vedanta philosophy as "the paragon of all monistic systems" and of Swamiji as "the paragon of Vedanta missionaries".'[65]

Arnold Toynbee

There are other great minds who came, along with James, from the Eastern seaboard of the United States. But before we fix our gaze there, we should revisit the European matrix to find another brilliant man of letters, the historian Arnold Toynbee whose name became synonymous with the overarching worldview of history. Professor Emeritus of International History at the University of London, Toynbee's greatness was in his refusal to look at the small picture. Toynbee studied entire civilizations — their interaction, their rise and fall. 'He was among the outstanding figures of our time.' The *Times* of London wrote: 'In his study of history he used his lively knowledge of mankind to set forth his views on the recurrent rise and fall of civilization and the general direction and meaning of human events.'[66]

With the publication of his six-volume *Study of History*, Oxford recognized Toynbee's greatness by conferring upon him an honorary degree. These first six volumes (which eventually became a ten-volume opus) were condensed into a one-volume condensation. This abridgment made his name in America, according to the *Times*, 'almost a household word'. The gist of Toynbee's worldview was, according to his obituary, that 'in the course of their growth civilizations almost inevitably commit the sin of *hubris*, which is expressed in nationalism, in militarism, and in the tyranny of a dominant minority. This moral breakdown brings with it its own *nemesis*.... Yet in the death-throes of a civilization human suffering is regarded by a new religious insight, the beginning of a Universal Religion which in turn engenders a new civilization.'[67]

About Western civilization Toynbee was pessimistic. Yet he felt that it, too, might be saved if it 'would abandon [its] hubris and turn again to God.'[68]

Toynbee's outlook flew in the face of his contemporaries who were rationalistic in the extreme, never caring to see the world's larger trends and their implications. Yet whatever professional disagreements there may have been, Toynbee was loved by all, known for his 'extraordinary modesty and humility. The serenity of his expression and the charming kindliness of his manner spoke of one who had lived his religion as well as written about it.'[69]

Given Toynbee's unique influence and perspective, his view of Sri Ramakrishna is of great interest. 'Sri Ramakrishna's message was unique in

being expressed in action', Toynbee writes in his introduction to Swami Ghanananda's *Ramakrishna and His Unique Message*. He continues:

> The message itself was the perennial message of Hinduism.... In the Hindu view, each of the higher religions is a true vision and a right way, and all of them alike are indispensable to mankind, because each gives a different glimpse of the same truth, and each leads by a different route to the same goal of human endeavours. Each, therefore, has a special spiritual value of its own which is not to be found in any of the others.
>
> To know this is good, but it is not enough. Religion is not just a matter for study; it is something that has to be experienced and to be lived, and this is the field in which Sri Ramakrishna manifested his uniqueness....
>
> Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance and delivered his message at the time and the place at which he and his message were needed.... [Ramakrishna] was born into a world that, in his lifetime, was, for the first time, being united on a literally world-wide scale. Today we are still living in this transitional chapter of the world's history, but it is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race. In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by Western technology. But this Western skill has not only 'annihilated distance'; it has armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. The Emperor Ashoka's and the Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions: here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family — and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.
>
> In the Atomic Age the whole human race has a utilitarian motive for following this Indian way. No utilitarian motive could be stronger or more respectable in itself. The survival of the human race is at stake. Yet even the strongest and most respectable utilitarian motive is only a secondary reason for taking Ramakrishna's and Gandhi's and Ashoka's teaching to heart and

acting on it. The primary reason is that this teaching is right — and is right because it flows from a true vision of spiritual reality.[70]

If Dr. Toynbee's remarks have been quoted at length, it is because his vision was exceptionally large, casting a greater shadow across the twentieth century than the vast majority of his peers. 'Whatever judgment posterity may make of his views of history', The *Times* of London wrote, 'it must praise him for undertaking to solve some of the most fundamental of human problems.'[71] Toynbee saw, and had the courage to publicly say, that the only viable solution to world problems — which were but human problems writ large — was the *spiritual* solution. Toynbee saw Sri Ramakrishna as the living embodiment of the spiritual solution and India as the wellspring that nurtured him.

Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, and Gerald Heard

England produced other great intellectual and cultural leaders that have drawn people into the orbit of the Ramakrishna Order. Oddly enough, three of these brilliant sons of England ended up expatriates in Southern California, drawn together by their search for the wisdom provided by the Ramakrishna Movement represented by Swami Prabhavananda. The English triumvirate consisted of Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley, and Gerald Heard. Together these three writers profoundly affected the intellectual atmosphere of America and the Western world.

In America during the 1940s and 50s, it was generally considered déclassé to follow Hindu philosophy. But in the sunny reaches of easygoing Southern California, prevailing social strictures had little hold. In course of time the study of Eastern philosophy became a socially acceptable response to the problems of the human condition: these three English writers greatly influenced this change in perspective. About meeting Swami Prabhavananda, Christopher Isherwood related: 'This was a contact which had far-reaching effects on the lives of all three of us. In Huxley's case, it was widely represented as the selling-out of a once brilliant intellect. As a matter of fact, it actually enlarged Huxley's already vast intellectual horizons by introducing him to mystical experience as a fact, a phenomenon of existence.'[72]

As the English triumvirate — fuelled by their newfound zeal for God-realization — meditated, wrote, and published, the value of mysticism became known to millions of people around the world. 'The growing audience for mystical ideas has been further widened by the publications of well-known authors like Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, and Christopher Isherwood', American historian Hal Bridges wrote.[73] He further noted, 'Like Isherwood, his friends Heard and Huxley.... have reached international reading audiences with numerous books exploring mystical ideas. Heard has advocated Vedanta in more than a few of the forty-seven volumes that he has published, chiefly in the fields of philosophy, history, science, and religion.'[74]

If Gerald Heard's popularity has faded with the passage of time, Isherwood's has only continued to grow. Some of his books that had lapsed out of print are being published again. The front page of the January 5, 1997 *New York Times Book Review* is dedicated to Isherwood; one full page of the January 13, 1997 issue of *Time* — written by the famed author Pico Iyer — is devoted to the publication of Isherwood's *Diaries: Volume I*. 'No wonder the unchanging centre of Isherwood's life [was] the Hindu Vedantist teacher Swami Prabhavananda', Iyer writes.[75] 'The singular strength of the book', Iyer continues, 'is that Isherwood brings this happy mix of earnestness and mischief to the realm where it is most essential and most rare: the search for God.'[76]

The upswing in Isherwood's popularity is a happy piece of poetic justice: having been perceived as one who had adopted 'California eccentricity and religiosity', his 'search for God' was directly responsible for his popularity's decline in the 50s and 60s.[77] When Isherwood was writing *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, he had practically no income whatsoever. In a 1963 letter to Swami Yogeshananda, Swami Prabhavananda mentions that he and Isherwood were planning to attend the Swamiji Centenary in India. The letter concomitantly reveals Isherwood's dire financial straits: 'They [the Swamiji Centenary Committee] were willing to pay our expenses. I refused to accept, but Chris had to accept because he has no money. This year he devoted himself completely to finishing writing the Life of the Master [*Ramakrishna and His Disciples*]. He did not have time to earn any money for himself.... The publishers in America and England will give substantial advance royalty as soon as they receive the ms [manuscript]. But of course Chris would not accept it — the Vedanta Society will receive the royalties.'[78]

'This is the story of a phenomenon.' Isherwood's arresting first sentence of Sri Ramakrishna's biography has been repeated so often that it has taken on a life of its own. Not only is the prose elegant but the intellect shining behind it rings true.

> I will begin by calling him simply that, rather than 'holy man', 'mystic', 'saint', or 'Avatar'; all emotive words with mixed associations which may attract some readers, repel others.
>
> A phenomenon is often something extraordinary and mysterious. Ramakrishna was extraordinary and mysterious; most of all to those who were best fitted to understand him. A phenomenon is always a fact, an object of experience. That is how I shall try to approach Ramakrishna.[79]

Isherwood, commendably, never lost the edge of the steely-eyed sceptic. Having lived inside the skin of one for so long himself, he presupposed on his audience's part a healthy scepticism and discerning intelligence. He never proselytized: he simply wrote out the facts as he saw them, leaving the reader to come to his or her own conclusion. The process seems to have worked very well.

Gore Vidal judged Isherwood to be 'the best British novelist of his generation.'[80] Fortunate it was for all concerned that Isherwood utilized his literary gifts to disseminate the ideas of the Ramakrishna Movement. 'With me', Isherwood acknowledged, 'everything starts with autobiography.' The autobiographical nature of Isherwood's writings made his wholehearted acceptance of Vedanta all the more important since even his later 'secular' writings carried within them Vedantic themes. More importantly, Isherwood and Swami Prabhavananda became a powerful literary team, translating the cream of India's scriptures to make them available for a vast reading audience. 'The importance of his conversion', Isherwood scholar Claude J. Summers wrote,

> can hardly be overestimated. His writing about religion, including such books as *An Approach to Vedanta* (1963) and *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (1965), and his translations, with Prabhavananda, of Hindu holy books, have absorbed much time and effort. More pertinent for an understanding of his career as a novelist, all of his later work is informed by Vedantism... all his

later novels illustrate the Vedantic belief that happiness lies in escape from the ego and in the discovery of the Atman, the impersonal God within man.[81]

The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita; *How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*; and Shankara's *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination* are the best-known Swami Prabhavananda-Isherwood collaborations. For many years each title was available in a mass-market edition by a major publisher, thus making the books widely available for the general public. 'A distinguished literary work' is how *Time* magazine characterized the Prabhavananda-Isherwood *Bhagavad-Gita*. Not only was it that, it was also a literary success, having sold over one million copies. It is the only Prabhavananda-Isherwood title still available in the mass-market edition. Today the book is still widely used as a college text and remains available in general-audience bookstores.

It is heartening that recently *The New York Times Book Review* included Isherwood in its roster of the best, most influential one hundred writers of the past century. Included in the same roster are James Joyce, Freud, Thomas Mann, T. S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad, Hemingway, and Kafka — a remarkable assemblage of intellectual and literary giants. 'I have not followed his excursions into Vedanta', the distinguished literary critic Alfred Kazin wrote of Isherwood, 'but I trust him to seek the truth in his own way, knowing that he seeks it for me, too.... He inspires the same good faith in his readers that is so much the secret, in himself, of his gift for creating character; of looking at the human problem with love and openness.'[82]

Another member of the Southern California literary triumvirate also appears in *The New York Times Book Review's* listing of the century's most influential writers: Aldous Huxley. As with Isherwood, it was Gerald Heard that introduced Huxley to Swami Prabhavananda. Swami Prabhavananda used to say that Huxley was the most brilliant man he had ever met. And, as he told Huxley's biographer Sybille Bedford, Huxley was also 'a noble soul'.[83] Huxley was, along with Heard and Isherwood, an initiated disciple of Swami Prabhavananda. Again, like Heard and Isherwood, he was a regular contributor to the Southern California Vedanta journal *Vedanta and the West*. And again, like Heard and Isherwood, Huxley saw Vedanta as the solution to the otherwise insoluble problems of human existence. 'The perennial philosophy, and Vedanta as its most ancient expression', Huxley-scholar Jerome Meckier has written, 'became

not only an alternative to meaninglessness and sexual and ethical confusion, but also, in *Island* (1962), a blueprint for the society of the future.'[84]

Huxley's literary output was astonishing: he wrote thirty-one books, sixty-five stories, and innumerable articles — Vedantic themes appearing in many of them. Huxley once described himself as an essayist who wrote novels. The statement is indicative of the genuine humility Huxley was known for, but in a sense it is true: as literary critics have noted, Huxley's novels are novels of ideas: his novels are vehicles to expound his personal philosophy. Huxley-scholar Charles G. Hoffman observed: 'As Anthony Beavis in *Eyeless in Gaza* states, everything that causes separation and division is evil, whether it be of the body, mind, or soul; everything that creates unity and harmony is good. Since the human condition of modern man is divisive and separatist in all aspects of endeavour — social, political, religious, and psychological — the individual must seek to achieve inner peace by transcending time through contemplative life.'[85]

The Perennial Philosophy is perhaps Huxley's best-known philosophical work. First published in 1944, it was met with critical acclaim: *The New York Times* called it a 'masterpiece'. *The New Yorker* wrote, 'Mr. Huxley writes as well as ever, occasionally with brilliance and wit, but now and then, in his absorption and other-worldliness, he soars clean out of sight.' For over a half-century it has continued to reach an extraordinarily wide audience, the book's appeal lying as much in its vast sweep as its suggestion that personal mysticism is the way to human salvation. 'It is axiomatic', the book declares, 'that the end of human life is contemplation, or the direct and intuitive awareness of God.'[86] One small anecdote attesting to the book's continued influence: During the 1996 Christmas season, Santa Barbara's local newspaper, the *Santa Barbara News-Press*, included *The Perennial Philosophy* in its short list of recommended holiday reading. Amazing indeed for a book published in 1944!

Where Isherwood was personal in his approach, Huxley was cerebral, scientific. According to historian Hal Bridges:

> Of the major American writers who have advocated the religious philosophy that Vivekananda brought to the United States, it is Huxley who is pre-eminently the philosopher-scientist, more so than his fellow British pilgrim to the Hollywood centre, Isherwood, more so even than

that other scientific pilgrim, Gerald Heard. All three, together with the swamis who have written books, have discussed their faith at the high intellectual level which is one of the chief characteristics of Vedantic thought in America.[87]

J. D. Salinger

Plenty of writing at a high intellectual level was also being done on the East Coast of the United States. The third Vedanta-influenced person mentioned by *The New York Times Book Review* as one of the century's most influential writers is J. D. Salinger. If Swami Prabhavananda was a Southern California magnet for intellectual greatness, Swami Nikhilananda was no less so. We have already mentioned Zimmer and Campbell in this regard. On a popular level J. D. Salinger was certainly as well known as these intellectual giants. What is less known is his long-standing and fruitful association with the Ramakrishna Movement.

'Salinger's conviction that our inner lives greatly matter peculiarly qualifies him to sing of an America where, for most of us, there seems little to do but to feel,' the legendary author John Updike wrote in *The New York Times Book Review*. 'Among his contemporaries', Updike continues, Salinger is 'a uniquely relevant literary artist.'[88] The uniquely relevant artist profoundly affected mid-twentieth-century American literature and culture. One of America's most widely-read authors, Salinger found his inspiration in the philosophy of Vedanta and the company of Swami Nikhilananda. His most celebrated book, *The Catcher in the Rye*, was published in 1945 — several years before he encountered Vedanta. It is his later works that reflect the influence of the Ramakrishna Movement.

One of the most highly acclaimed was *Franny and Zooey*, written when Salinger was steeped in Vedanta philosophy. Salinger authority Dr. Sumitra Menon quotes a letter from Brahmachāri Buddhachaitanya [now Swami Yogeshananda] stating that he was present in the New York Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre when Salinger presented an inscribed copy of *Franny and Zooey* to Swami Nikhilananda. While Buddhachaitanya couldn't remember the exact wording, the purport of the inscription was that Salinger was 'able to circulate the ideas of Vedanta only through the medium of such stories as

these.' The inscription also expressed 'appreciation for his contact with Swami Nikhilananda.'[89] Salinger authority Warren French observed:

> It was not until early in the 1950s that Salinger had become interested in Advaita Vedanta, the form of Hinduism that Eberhard Alsen [another Salinger authority] argues persuasively provides [his] principal theological framework.... Salinger studied these doctrines formally under Swami Nikhilananda, founder of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York City. Salinger became a good friend of the guru and of his successor, Swami Adiswarananda, and has remained associated with the Centre.[90]

Salinger's post-*Catcher* work centres around the fictional Glass family. Seymour Glass — Salinger's alter-ego — in one of Salinger's later stories describes Swami Vivekananda as 'one of the most exciting, original, and best-equipped giants of this century.' Seymour further declares: 'My personal sympathy for him will never be outgrown or exhausted as long as I live, mark my words, I would easily give ten years of my life, possibly more, if I could have shaken his hand or at least said a brisk, respectful hello to him on some busy street in Calcutta or elsewhere.'[91] In his short story 'Seymour — An Introduction', Seymour says of himself, 'I tend to regard myself, if at all by anything as sweet as an Eastern name, as a fourth-class Karma Yogin, with perhaps a little Jñāna Yoga thrown in to spice up the pot.'[92]

As Salinger told Nikhilananda, it was through stories like these that he was able to circulate Vedantic ideas. And like Campbell and Zimmer, Salinger's method was to drop Ramakrishna's name throughout his writing. Those who become intrigued would be motivated to search further.

Literary critics have pointed out how Salinger played an important role in bringing America's youth to Eastern philosophy. Warren French writes, 'Recent essays about Salinger... stress both the way in which a growing interest in Asian thought in the West has led readers back through "a passage to India" through Salinger and the way in which his colloquial embodiments of these ancient speculations have subconsciously implanted them into the minds of sensitive young Americans appalled by the increasing "phoniness" of their own materialistic culture.'[93]

Salinger's body of work is amazingly small. What is remarkable is the major reputation he continues to hold despite his meagre literary output.

Salinger's particular gift was his unique ability to speak to several generations in a way that few writers have been able to do before or since. Many of those who read Salinger felt that he was telling their own story. His reach was wide while his language was familiar, colloquial, cosy. When Salinger spoke through his characters, the reader felt a direct address; the voice seemed true and real. That voice brought the reader from the mundane to the spiritual. Salinger's work, French writes, is 'the journey of the human spirit through the illusion of the material world to the transcendent spiritual Oneness beyond.'[94]

Salinger's writings have deeply affected literally millions of people. While few of those people know that they have been charged with the memes springing from the Ramakrishna Movement, they have been touched by these ideas nonetheless. And those who think deeply about what Salinger has written will continue their search.

Thomas Merton

One man who never stopped searching was Thomas Merton — Trappist monk, best selling author, prominent intellectual, social reformer, and alpha leader of the interreligious dialogue movement. 'Merton's first notion was to pluck whatever "Christian" gems he could out of the East that might fit into the Catholic theological structure', Edward Rice wrote in the *New York Times Book Review*. 'Later he abandoned this attempt and accepted Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam on their own equally valid terms… without compromising his own Christianity.'[95]

Merton was always in the disquieting position of living ahead of his time. His views were controversial and he continually faced difficulties with his religious superiors who viewed his 'radical' positions (such as learning from the East) with alarm. Merton was bold and public in his boldness; his influence was great while he was alive; since his death in 1968, his influence has only continued to grow.

Merton had travelled to the East in 1968 to attend an ecumenical monastic conference in Bangkok. Before the conference began, he visited India and had enriching contact with the Ramakrishna Order. On October 24th he visited Narendrapur, writing in the journal which later became known as *The Asian Journal*, Merton notes: 'The warmth of the Ramakrishna monks, alert and

quiet. Especially Swami Lokeswarananda whom I like very much. They invited me back.... I did not go to a committee meeting yesterday; went back to Narendrapur instead.'[96] *The Asian Journal* has a long and appreciative endnote about Sri Ramakrishna, describing him as 'a Bengali visionary, saint, and teacher who founded the Ramakrishna Movement, in which God is worshipped as the Mother of the Universe. Combining the scriptures and disciplines of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, Sri Ramakrishna reached the realization of a single God-Consciousness. For further study, the reader is advised to read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.'[97] The endnote also mentions the Vedanta Societies in America which were the result of Sri Ramakrishna's leading disciple, Swami Vivekananda.

Attending an interfaith meeting in Calcutta that November, Merton said in his prepared remarks, 'I come as a pilgrim who is anxious to obtain not just information, not just facts about other monastic traditions, but to drink from ancient sources of monastic vision and experience. I seek not only to learn more (quantitatively) about religion and monastic life, but to become a better and more enlightened monk (qualitatively) myself.'[98]

'Ramakrishna has the solution', Merton told Brother David Steindl-Rast — another great Catholic monk and respected author. Solution to what? To the vexing questions inherent in dualism. When asked about the prayer of intercession, Merton told Steindl-Rast, 'We are not rainmakers, but Christians. In our dealings with God he is free and so are we. It's simply a need for me to express my love by praying for my friends....' When asked whether this attitude didn't imply dualism, Merton replied:

> Really there isn't and yet there is. You have to see your will and God's will dualistically for a long time. You have to experience duality for a long time until you see it's not there. In this respect I am a Hindu. Ramakrishna has the solution. Don't consider dualistic prayer on a lower level.... There are no levels. Any moment you can break through to the underlying unity which is God's gift in Christ. In the end, Praise praises. Thanksgiving gives thanks. Jesus prays. Openness is all.[99]

One of the great gifts that the Ramakrishna Movement brought to the West was the affirmation that God could be realized as personal or impersonal. God could be both formless or with form — the concepts were not mutually

exclusive. For those unable to accept a dualistic religion, Vedanta's broad philosophy opened the door to their once stifled spiritual development. The liberating assertions of Advaita Vedanta brought many an intellectual and cultural leader into the fold of the Ramakrishna Movement.

Albert Einstein

Another great gift that the Ramakrishna Movemnt brought to the West was its emphasis on meditation. One man who valued this emphasis — perhaps not surprisingly — was Albert Einstein. Swami Nikhilananda had met Einstein and felt Einstein's great interest and sympathy for Vedantic ideals. The following anecdote, however, comes via Swami Prabhavananda, who on many occasions related the following story to his monastic community in Southern California. According to Swami Prabhavananda, Einstein had read *The Eternal Companion: The Life and Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* and was deeply impressed. Upon finishing the book, Einstein remarked: 'Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] was right. Meditation is important. We know what goes on in the external world but we don't know what goes on here (pointing to his heart).'[100]

Pitirim Sorokin

New York has been shown as a veritable beehive of intellectual activity, but there is another formidable magnet on the East Coast — Boston, with its Ramakrishna-Vedanta Society. Boston has traditionally been the heart of American intellectual life: Harvard, M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and several other high-calibre universities and colleges are located in this city of the learned elite. From Swamiji's time on down, Boston has been an intellectual force to reckon with. For many years the Swami-in-charge of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta Society has been one of the chaplains at M.I.T — first Swami Akhilananda and later Swami Sarvagatananda.

An intellectual luminary who graced Boston — and was himself graced by his association with Swami Akhilananda — was the celebrated Harvard sociologist, Pitirim Sorokin. Sorokin 'was instrumental in establishing sociology's reputation at Harvard.'[101] He is considered one of the century's great

sociologists. Yet he was more than that also: Sorokin was a scientist, philosopher, and a widely-respected thinker. His books, notably *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, are still considered the authoritative word in his field. So respected was he that a series of essays was written in his honour. One of Sorokin's books, *The Ways and Power of Love*, contains several references to Sri Ramakrishna.

Although Sorokin died in 1968, he is still today referred to by last name only in texts and discussions on societal topics — so much does his presence continue to dominate intellectual and social discourse. The Family Research Council quoted his views on the family last year before the United States Senate. A quick browse on the Internet will find Sorokin's name being invoked regarding such controversial subjects as gay marriage rights.

Sorokin founded the Harvard Research Centre for the study of Creative Altruism. Historian Hal Bridges observed that the Research Centre

> conducted studies of unselfish love that have involved the investigation of mysticism from the standpoint of psychology. On the basis of these studies [Sorokin] declared in 1954 that 'the "depth psychology" of the prevalent theories of personality is quite shallow. It either flattens the mental structure almost exclusively to the level of the unconscious or subconscious, with a sort of epiphenomenal and vague "ego" and "superego", or just depicts it as a "two-storey building" — the unconscious (subconscious) and the conscious (rational).' [Sorokin] suggested that the structure be viewed as fourfold.... (1) the... subconscious; (2) the... conscious; (3) the socio-culturally conscious; and (4) the supraconscious.
>
> 'The supraconscious', [Sorokin] explains, 'is egoless: it transcends ego entirely and unconditionally.... It seems to be the fountainhead of the greatest achievements and discoveries in all fields of human creative activity: science, religion, philosophy, technology, ethics, law, the fine arts, economics, and politics.'[102]

Sorokin published his ideas in the 1950s and 'won the approval of scholarly mystics as well as non-mystical scholars. Akhilananda contributed to one of the Research Centre volumes an essay on the Vedantist way to mental health. He also joined Sorokin and others in organizing, in 1955, the Research Society in Creative Altruism.'[103]

The Society convened at M.I.T. and was attended by several hundred scientists and scholars. Sadly, because of lack of funds the Society did not last. His ideas, thankfully, have continued to last. One of his ideas was a new philosophy of science which he called 'integralism'. In the integral age that he anticipated, there would be greater emphasis on creative altruism (unconditional love) and superconscious intuition (spiritual knowledge). Sorokin's article, 'Two Great Social Changes of Our Time' appearing in the 1957 *Prabuddha Bharata*, discusses the Ramakrishna Movement in relation to integralism:

> A successful growth of Sri Ramakrishna and of the Vedanta Movements in the West is one of many symptoms of two basic processes which are going on at the present time in the human universe. One of these changes is the epochal shift of the creative centre of mankind from Europe to the larger area of the Pacific-Atlantic, while the other consists in a double process of continued growth of the new — Integral or Ideational — socio-cultural order.[104]

Will Durant

Where Sorokin made sociology soar from his academic field into spiritual realms, Will Durant (in collaboration with his wife, Ariel) took the great range of human civilization and made it available for general understanding. Durant was Sorokin's contemporary, and like Sorokin and Toynbee, his focus was on the big picture. Durant's particular glory was placing the big picture in such a way that everyone could see it and understand it clearly.

The Durant's eleven-volume magnum opus was *The Story of Civilization* — a daunting project which the Durants themselves called 'an absurd enterprise... immodest in its very conception.' The series nevertheless sold millions of copies. First written in 1926 and revised in 1933, all the volumes were best-sellers. The tenth volume, *Rousseau and the Revolution*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction in 1968. In 1977 Durant was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Considering Durant's great popular appeal and repute, it is notable that two full pages of *The Story of Civilization's* first volume are devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananada, Durant writes, 'preached to his countrymen a more virile creed than any Hindu had offered

them since Vedic days.' The text then moves into quoting Swamiji directly: 'The highest truth is this: God is present in all beings. They are His multiple forms.... He alone serves God who serves all other beings!... The first of all worship is the worship of those all around us.... These are all our gods — men and animals; and the first gods we have to worship are our own countrymen.' Durant then adds his own final comment, 'It was but a step from this to Gandhi.'[105]

Mahatma Gandhi

We also will step to Gandhi, of whom Einstein said, 'Generations to come... will scarcely believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.'[106] Gandhi was without question one of the twentieth century's greatest human beings. While Gandhi has been called the Father of the Nation in India, he was vastly more than that. His unswerving commitment to humanity's highest ideals not only made the British empire falter — the whole world stood in awe of this man's uncompromising ethical life. He proved that one human being, strengthened by truth and purity, could change the world. Author Ved Mehta has written:

> Gandhi was not endowed with any unusual artistic, scholarly, or scientific talents. He never earned a degree or received any special academic honour. He was never a candidate in an election or a holder of public office. Yet when he died... practically the whole world mourned him. Albert Einstein said in his tribute, 'Gandhi... demonstrated that a powerful human following can be assembled... through the cogent example of a morally superior conduct of life.' Other tributes compared Gandhi to Socrates, to Buddha, to Jesus, to Saint Francis of Assisi.[107]

Gandhi's stainless, powerful example proved to be the stencil upon which other liberation movements were to be traced. Martin Luther King Jr. changed the face of America by his dedication to Gandhi's principles; to a much lesser degree, Cesar Chavez did the same. Nelson Mandela toppled apartheid and brought freedom to South Africa by consciously patterning his movement upon the Gandhian principle of non-violence and passive resistance. Environmentalists, peace activists, and others fighting oppression in every field have made Gandhi their ideal.

It has even been suggested by a professor at the University of California in Berkeley that this century will be known as Gandhi's century — so powerful was his mark on world events. Truthfulness, non-violence, and purity were his watchwords. In his personality they were inextricably linked. It is not surprising, therefore, that he held both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the highest regard. 'The story of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's life is a story of religion in practice', Gandhi wrote in the Foreword to *The Life of Ramakrishna*, published by Advaita Ashrama in 1925:

> His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in Ahimsa [nonviolence]. His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all who read the following pages.'[108]

Gandhi's appreciation for Swami Vivekananda was just as great. In fact, Gandhi had gone to Belur Math to meet Swamiji, but sadly, Swamiji was away at the time and their meeting never took place. Speaking at Belur Math on 6 February 1921, Gandhi said:

> I have come here to pay my homage and respect to the revered memory of Swami Vivekananda, whose birthday is being celebrated today. I have gone through his works very thoroughly, and after having gone through them, the love that I had for my country became a thousand-fold. I ask you, young men, not to go away empty-handed without imbibing something of the spirit of the place where Swami Vivekananda lived and died.[109]

Jawaharlal Nehru

With Gandhi's assassination, Jawaharlal Nehru — India's first Prime Minister — was left holding India's mantle. Both men were larger than life.

Where Gandhi was emphatic in his simplicity, Nehru was sophisticated, courtly, polished. His books *Glimpses of World History* and *The Discovery of India* are masterpieces of English prose, their elegance reflecting the author's own. Where Gandhi lived his life to fit his ideals, Nehru lived his life in the realm of worldly realities. 'But even a man of earth can admire and perhaps be influenced by a man of God', Nehru said when he spoke at the Ramakrishna Mission in New Delhi in 1949. Nehru continued: 'Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa obviously was completely outside the run of average humanity. He appears to be in the tradition of the great *rishis* of India, who have come from time to time to draw our attention to higher things of life and of the spirit.' In the same address, Nehru also remarked:

> One of the effects of Sri Ramakrishna's life was the peculiar way in which he influenced other people who came in contact with him. Men often scoffed from a distance at this man of no learning, and yet when they came to him, very soon they bowed their heads before this man of God and ceased to scoff and 'remained to pray'.[110]

One wonders how much Nehru himself 'remained to pray', for Nehru's wife was a disciple of Swami Shivananda. Swami Prabhavananda said of Nehru, 'The poor fellow had to come to Belur Math and sit on a bench while she had long talks with Mahapurush Maharaj, meditated in the shrine-room, etc.'[111]

Nehru was as impressed with Swami Vivekananda as he was with Swamiji's Master. In *The Discovery of India* we read:

> Rooted in the past and full of pride in India's prestige, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life's problems and was a kind of bridge between the past of India and her present. He was a powerful orator in Bengali and English and a graceful writer of Bengali prose and poetry. He was a fine figure of a man, imposing, full of poise and dignity, sure of himself and his mission, and at the same time full of a dynamic and fiery energy and a passion to push India forward. He came as a tonic to the depressed and demoralized Hindu mind and gave it self-reliance and some roots in the past.[112]

In the aforementioned speech given at the Delhi Mission, Nehru said that Swamiji was

> one of the great founders... of the national modern movement of India, and a great number of people who took more or less an active part in that movement in a later date drew their inspiration from Swami Vivekananda. Directly or indirectly he has powerfully influenced the India of today. And I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, of spirit and fire, that flows through Swami Vivekananda.[113]

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

No mention of India's founders can be complete without discussing that remarkable philosopher-statesman, Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Dr. Radhakrishnan was India's first Vice-President, succeeding Dr. Rajendra Prasad to become India's second President in 1962, a position he held until 1967. Comparisons have been frequently made between Dr. Radhakrishnan's stellar career and Plato's ideal of the philosopher-king. It seems that Radhakrishnan came as close to the ideal as possible, for his career was dazzling in every area of endeavour. A distinguished statesman, a brilliant orator, an educator, and a highly respected philosopher, he was also the author of a great many books on Indian philosophy. His particular strength was in explaining Eastern thought to Westerners. For many years Dr. Radhakrishnan was Spaulding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford University. He held other significant educational posts in India as well. Of his many books, some of the more noted are: *An Idealist View of Life*; *A Source-book in Indian Philosophy*; *The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads*; and *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*. About the latter book, the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote: 'This book may well mark the turning point in Western civilization. It certainly should.'

In his introduction to the first volume of *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Dr. Radhakrishnan wrote:

> While the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna did not penetrate so much into academic circles, they found their way into lonely hearts who have been stranded in their pursuit of pleasure and selfish desires. Under the inspiration of this great teacher there has been a powerful revival of social compassion.... He has helped to raise from the dust the fallen standard of Hinduism, not in words merely, but in works also.[114]

Of Swami Vivekananda Dr. Radhakrishnan noted:

> If there is any call which Vivekananda made to us, it is to rely on our own spiritual resources.... He gave us fortitude in suffering, he gave us hope in distress, he gave us courage in despair. He told us: 'Do not be led away by the appearances. Deep down there is a providential will, there is a purpose in this universe. You must try to cooperate with that purpose and try to achieve it.'[115]

Rabindranath Tagore

Historian Sinharaj Tammita-Delgoda observed that the best-known contributors to India's international reputation came from the world of literature and philosophy. Philosophy we have just seen; the best representative of India's twentieth-century world of literature is without doubt Rabindranath Tagore. Prince of poets, playwright, novelist, Nobel laureate, mystic — all these epithets describe Tagore but none do so adequately.

Tagore was the most celebrated poet of modern India. More than just a famous poet, he was a national figure — a genuine embodiment of India's genius. Tagore received the Nobel prize in literature for his English *Gitanjali* which also had a laudatory introduction by W. B. Yeats. Rabindranath came from the distinguished Tagore family whose lineage had been peopled with artists, writers, and social reformers. 'Rabindranath', according to Nehru, 'towered above them all, and indeed all over India his position gradually became one of unchallenged supremacy.... His influence over the mind of India, and especially of successive rising generations, has been tremendous. Not Bengali only... but all the modern languages of India have been moulded partly by his writings. More than any other Indian, he has helped to bring into harmony the ideals of the East and the West.'[116] In 1936 Tagore wrote the following poem for publication in the *Prabuddha Bharata*:

> To the Paramahansa Ramakrishna Deva
> Diverse courses of worship
> from various springs of fulfilment
> have mingled in your meditation.
> The manifold revelation of the joy of the Infinite

has given form to a shrine of unity in your life
Where from far and near arrive salutations
To which I join mine own.[117]

Concerning Swami Vivekananda, the following anecdote has come to us via Swami Ashokananda. Romain Rolland told the Swami that Tagore had told him, 'If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative.'[118] Tagore was remarkable in that he was a major literary and intellectual presence in both East and West.

U Thant

Another luminary who gracefully straddled both East and West was the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, U Thant. Before coming to New York to serve at the United Nations, U Thant had been closely connected with the Ramakrishna Mission in Burma. In an address given at the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York, U Thant declared: 'Swami Vivekananda... was the greatest spiritual ambassador of India... in the history of the world. And for that matter, in the history of Asia.'

One who attended U Thant's speech was John Moffitt, who wrote Swami Yogeshananda: 'U Thant was marvellous. He was thoroughly familiar with the Mission's work in Burma and had evidently read a lot of Swamiji's life.... The general effect was very solid and impressive.'[119]

'If we attempt to analyze the main purpose of Swami Vivekananda's mission to this country', U Thant continued:

> my interpretation is he wanted to find a harmony, a kind of synthesis between the Eastern concept of culture and civilization and the Western concept of culture and civilization.... Another aspect of Swami Vivekananda's mission... is the need of tolerance in human relations. Not only religious tolerance but also tolerance in all spheres of activity. This spirit of tolerance, this philosophy of live and let live, this concept of trying to understand the other's point of view, has been what Swami Vivekananda strove to put across — particularly to the American people....

Interesting and unusual for a man in the political arena, U Thant understood the vital importance of meditation for human development. He also recognized

that this was one of the great gifts that the Ramakrishna Movement brought to the world through Swami Vivekananda. Continuing, U Thant said:

> Swami Vivekananda attempted to present a very simple exposition of... contemplation and meditation so that Westerners may not be lopsided in their development -- only exclusively in the intellectual field. Because he felt, very rightly, that the mere intellectual development will lead only to the discovery of what is outside of us.

Describing Swamiji as 'one of the greatest men of all time', U Thant then added that to him, Swamiji's message, 'I accept all the religions that were in the past... all that may come in the future' was 'one of the wisest maxims which ever came into my experience.'[120] It is remarkable that even at the highest diplomatic and political levels, the ideas of the Ramakrishna Movement have spread far and touched deeply.

Dr. Huston Smith

At this point some readers may be struck by the fact that most of the intellectual and cultural leaders we have discussed are now departed. Is the spread of the Ramakrishna Movement's ideas only in the past tense? Gratefully, no. The memes, self-propelled, are continuing their own work.

One prominent intellectual leader who comes immediately to mind is Dr. Huston Smith who has variously been called 'the world's greatest authority on world religions'; 'the world's ambassador to religions everywhere'; a 'media star'; and 'a man of passionate intellect and immense heart'. He is the author of *The World's Religions* (previously entitled *The Religions of Man*) which also has a separate incarnation as *The Illustrated World's Religions*. Over two million copies of the various editions have been sold. This classic of a book has been in continuous publication since 1958 and has been translated into fourteen languages. Considered the standard by which to judge other texts on world religions, *The World's Religions* is one of the most frequently assigned books for college level classes on religion. In every edition of this book, Sri Ramakrishna is both mentioned and quoted. In *The Religions of Man*, Smith says that Sri Ramakrishna was 'the greatest Hindu saint of the nineteenth century.'[121]

Dr. Smith has also created films on Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Sufism, which have won awards at international film festivals. Over the years, Dr. Smith has had several television series on world religions; the latest and most popular was *The Wisdom of Faith with Huston Smith*, a five-part series that consisted of Bill Moyers's televised interviews with Dr. Smith. The popularity of the series won him the appellation of 'media star' which jars with his modest, self-effacing demeanour. A scholar and genuine spiritual aspirant, Smith has been able to reach an immense audience and instill in them his infectious enthusiasm for spirituality.

The son of a Methodist minister, Smith began his career with no intention of studying mysticism, let alone applying it. 'I was going along in my Christianity', he later said, 'and then suddenly the mystical tidal wave just came over me and washed me into the surf.' He could have stayed with mystical Christianity, he added, but in America in the 1940s 'I found more spiritual depth in the Vedanta of Hinduism than I found in the Christianity I was being taught in the divinity school at the University of Chicago.'[122]

It was actually the writings of Gerald Heard that evoked Smith's interest in mysticism in general, Vedanta in particular. His mind on fire, he devoured everything he could find that Heard had written. Realizing his Ph.D. thesis would not see the light of day were he to continue at that rate, he made a vow to quit reading Heard until the thesis was complete. He kept his vow, then hitchhiked to Trabuco Canyon to meet Gerald Heard, Swami Prabhavananda, and Aldous Huxley. The intellectual and spiritual atmosphere was rarefied, the experience exhilarating. Since Smith had a teaching position in the Midwest, Smith was advised to seek out Swami Satprakashananda at the Vedanta Society in St. Louis, Missouri. So he did, and the contact was a blessed one that Smith continues to cherish up to this day.[123]

One of the many satisfactions of viewing *The Wisdom of Faith* was to see a photograph of Swami Satprakashananda taking up the entire television screen while hearing Huston Smith's voice in the background speaking of how much he gained from his association with the Swami. In the television series Smith clearly emphasized how much he gained spiritually from the Vedanta Movement and Swami Satprakashananda in particular. On Christmas Eve, for example, Smith and his family would attend a local Christian church for the family worship. Once home, however, Dr. Smith would leave for the Vedanta Society

to hear Swami Satprakashananda speak of the message of Christ. That, Smith remarked, while millions of television viewers listened, was where he got his spiritual sustenance.

Dr. Smith has kept his Vedanta connections, and states that he enjoys doing so. He regularly attends the Olema retreat every May, sponsored by the Vedanta Society of Northern California. He has regularly written forewords, introductions, and appreciations for many Vedanta books and has participated in Vedanta seminars and other functions. It has been a long and fruitful association for both Dr. Smith and for the Ramakrishna Movement.

Richard Stine

Another example unexpectedly appears in the contemporary American art scene. Long-time Vedantin Richard Stine has cut a radiant figure in the arenas of both art and literature. His collected art and writings have been placed in a best-selling art book, *The World of Richard Stine*, which has sold briskly across the country. While Stine has not yet achieved the widespread fame of our earlier thinkers, he is nevertheless a significant example of how Vedanta has moved into the West's cultural mainstream. Using Vedanta philosophy as his inspiration and springboard, Stine takes Sri Ramakrishna's parables and places them in the current American idiom, occasionally adding tiny photos of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Prabhavananda to his palette. The book's text also contains a glowing tribute to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. 'This is a book that is not a book', he writes. 'It's brimming over with wonderful ideas, with encouragement, with generosity, and at the same time it puts a grand perspective on everything, besides leaving plenty of room for creativity. Every time I read it, it changes like a chameleon, turning into something different, something more.... It's like the best teacher and best pal rolled into one. It's had a profound influence on my art, my life, my every breath. And this is no exaggeration.'[124] Thus the ideas of the Ramakrishna Movement continue to take form and appear — in this case, squarely in the middle of the world of American art.

It is important to mention that what has been written above is not the sum and substance of the Ramakrishna Movement's presence in the world of ideas. There are other significant intellectual and cultural leaders worldwide that

have not been named: philosophers, authors, playwrights, musicians, and artists. For lack of space the discussion has been limited to what is hoped to be the most significant and representative.

One crucial point needs to be made before we conclude: Let no one assume that if the names of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are at times invisible, their ideas are not being received and understood. Memes are not obliged to have return address labels. The thought currents of the Ramakrishna Movement have spread out with remarkable speed and power into the world of ideas. Ideas that were once considered heretical are now accepted as basic spiritual wisdom. The oneness of existence, the divinity of the soul, the essential unity of religions — these great truths are now entering the world's thought currents from thousands of various streams and sources. As an example, the high-quality intellectual journal *New Perspectives Quarterly* said in its Spring 1994 editorial:

> Out of the debris of these exploding old ways of life perhaps a spiritual path can be found not unlike that discovered by the ancients for India; a wide path that can embrace the ambiguities, doubts and plural certitudes of the polycentric mind. Not the liberal secular way that kills all belief with tolerant indifference, but a path that makes room for the spirit and banishes only nihilism from its magnanimous soul.[125]

'Ideas are, in truth, forces', Henry James wrote. 'Infinite, too, is the power of the personality. A union of the two always makes history.'[126] The Ramakrishna Movement has been a tremendous force in the world of ideas because of the powerful personalities that took its thoughts and broadcast them around the world, spanning both place and time. We can see how these great intellectual and cultural leaders successfully cross-pollinated one another, the intellectual web becoming more and more enriched with the gradual accrual of each idea's filament.

The strength of the Ramakrishna Movement has never been in numbers. Its force has been and always will be in the spiritual power radiating from its founder. From that eternal spring countless numbers of people have slaked their thirst for God, finding in its beneficent waters both spiritual and intellectual sustenance. The web of the Ramakrishna Movement today covers with a glorious spiritual tapestry all the continents on this increasingly small planet. Our

challenge will be to fill in the web, add detail and whatever lustre we can to the existing grand tapestry, all the while remaining true to the original goal and impetus of the Ramakrishna Movement.

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Our Contributors

Aleaz, K. P.
Professor of Religion and Dean of Research, Bishop's College, Calcutta.

Archie and Eleanor Stark
Members of Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston, USA.

Basu, Sankari Prasad
Ramtanu Lahiri Professor of Bengali, Calcutta University.

Bhattacharya, Pandit Sri Srimohan
A scholar at Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta.

Chakraborty, Nirod Baran
Formerly Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy, Presidency College, Calcutta.

Chakraborty, Shiv Shankar
The late Director of Lokashiksha Parishad, Narendrapur.

Chelishev, E. P.
A noted Russian academician.

Clooney, Francis X
The late Professor of Theology, Boston College, USA.

Das Gupta, Amalendu
Former Assistant Editor of the Statesman, Calcutta.

Das Gupta, R. K.
Formerly Director, National Library, Calcutta.

Dasgupta, Santwana
The late Head of the Department of Economics, Bethune College, Calcutta.

Dhar, Satchidananda
Former Principal, Ramakrishna Mahavidyalaya, Kailashar, Tripura.

Friedrichs, Kurt
Chairman of the Vedanta Centre, Wiesbaden, Germany.

Ghosh, Sunilbihari
Archivist and scholar, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta.

Luiz Antonio Souto Monteiro
A devotee from Rio de Janerio.

Madison, Dorothy
The late devotee from Alameda, USA, retired as school teacher.

Majumdar, Swaraj
A scholar associated with Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta.

Mohanty, J. N.
Professor of Philosophy, Temple University, USA.

Mukherjee, Amitabha
Director, Calcutta Historical Society.

Pravrajika Atmaprana
A senior nun of Sri Sarada Math, Head of Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Delhi.

Pravrajika Brahmaprana
A nun of Vedanta Society of Southern California, Santa Barbara, USA.

Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana
A nun of Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Calcutta.

Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana
A nun at the Vedanta Society, Hollywood.

Pravrajika Vrajaprana
A nun of Vedanta Society of Southern California, Santa Barbara, USA.

Ramakrishnan, C. S.
Devotee from Chennai, former joint-Editor of *The Vedanta Kesari*.

Reddy, Aasha
A devotee from Chennai.

Roy, Sumita
A professor of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Sansen, Jean Raoul
A scholar living in Paris.

Sivaramkrishna, M.
A professor of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Swami Adiswarananda
Minister-in-charge, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York.

Swami Atmajnanananda
Assistant Minister, Vedanta Society of Greater Washington, Washington D.C.

Swami Atmapriyananda
Vice Chancellor, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (Deemed University).

Swami Atmarupananda
A monk of Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood.

Swami Atmasthananda
Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

Swami Balabhadrananda
Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Asansol, West Bengal.

Swami Bhajanananda
Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

Swami Bhaskarananda
Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle.

Swami Bhuteshananda
The late twelfth President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Swami Brahmeshananda
Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh.

Swami Gahanananda
The fourteenth President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

Swami Gautamananda
President, Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

Swami Harshananda
President, Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore.

Swami Hiranmayananda
The late former General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Swami Jitatmananda
Secretary, Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, Calcutta.

Swami Lokeswarananda
The late Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta.

Swami Medhasananda
Swami-in-charge, Nippon Vedanta Kyokai, Japan.

Swami Muktinathananda
Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow.

Swami Muktirupananda
Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore.

Swami Mumukshananda
President, Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar, Calcutta.

Swami Nikhileswarananda
Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara, Gujarat.

Swami Pareshananda
Minister-in-charge, Ramakrishna Ashrama, Buenos Aires.

Swami Prabhananda
Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta.

Swami Purnatmananda
Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Agartala.

Swami Ranganathananda
The late thirteenth President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

Swami Shivamayananda
Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

Swami Shuddhidananda
A monk of Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

Swami Smaranananda
General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

Swami Sridharananda
Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Centre of Sydney, Australia.

Swami Sunirmalananda
A monk of Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, São Paolo, Brazil; former editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

Swami Tathagatananda
Minister-in-charge, Vedanta Society, New York.

Swami Tyagananda
Monk-in-charge, Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston.

Swami Vedananda
A monk of Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco.

Swami Vimalatmananda
A monk of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math.

Walters, Susan
A member of Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

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Abbreviations

Br = Brahmachari
HM = Holy Mother
Rk = Ramakrishna
Sw = Swami
Vk = Vivekananda
VSNC = Vedanta Society of Northern California
VSSC = Vedanta Society of Southern California

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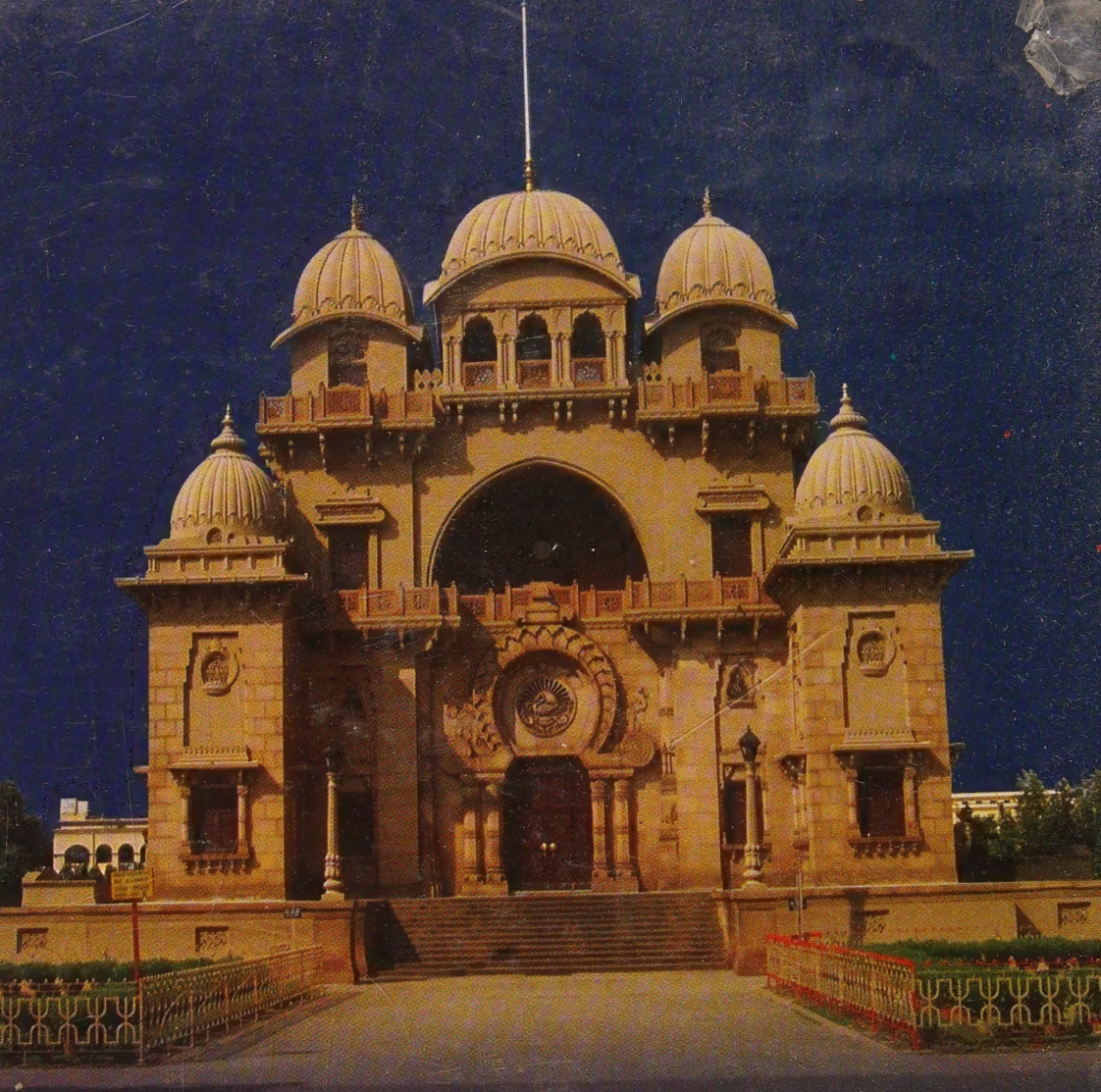

The power that will have its rise from here [Belur Math] will flood the whole world and turn the course of men's lives into different channels....

— Swami Vivekananda —

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